



# Franklin Public Schools

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January 12, 2021

Dear Franklin Families and Faculty/Staff,

On Friday, Governor Baker and Commissioner Riley announced a new testing pilot for K-12 public schools that screens asymptomatic individuals for the Coronavirus that causes COVID-19. This relatively new testing format is an effective, lower-cost solution to individual tests. It is intended to provide an additional layer of prevention within the school and community. This testing pilot is offered at no cost to districts for the first six weeks, after which districts can use federal stimulus funding (or other resources) to continue the testing program.

I will be speaking further about the testing opportunity at the School Committee meeting this evening. The effectiveness of the program is dependent on two things:

1. A relatively low rate of COVID-19 within the community and
2. A relatively high participation rate of faculty, staff, and students.

The Superintendent's Report at School Committee tonight will form the basis of an educational slide show that will be shared with you to explain more about this "pool testing". We will send a survey to families and to faculty/staff to gauge interest in participation. Formal consent forms are part of the testing program and would be completed later on.

I will send the slide show and survey tomorrow. To assist you in completing the survey, the district will hold a webinar on pool testing for families on Thursday, January 14, 2021 at 7:00 PM. A Q and A session for Faculty/Staff will be held on Wednesday, January 13, 2021 at 3:00 PM. Links will be shared when the survey is sent out. In the meantime, please read the additional information at the end of this document.

We are enthusiastic that testing, along with the rollout of vaccines, will provide two important tools that assist us with having instruction in our school buildings. These should offer additional reassurance that COVID-19 is being contained in our school community to both faculty and families alike.

Sincerely,

Sara Ahern  
Superintendent of Schools

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**Franklin Public Schools**  
*Background Information about Classroom-Based Pool Testing for Coronavirus*

What is pool testing?

Pool testing is a method of surveillance testing for the Coronavirus responsible for COVID-19. With pool testing, groups of individuals contribute test samples on a regular basis. Samples are sometimes saliva-based and sometimes samples are collected from lower anterior nasal swabs.

The samples are “pooled” together and one test is run in order to detect the presence of the virus within that pooled sample of individuals. Pools are typically between groups of 10-24 people. This method is an effective one in places where the prevalence of the virus is relatively low and a relatively large percentage (typically about 80%) of individuals have consented for their samples to be collected. This method is cost-effective because one test kit can be used to test between 10-24 people at a time. Results are delivered within 24-48 hours.

In the case of the DESE pilot, samples are lower anterior nasal swabs that are collected by the individual submitting the sample. A PCR test is run on the pooled samples. Pilot studies have shown that this is feasible with children as young as grade 3. Younger students may self administer a swab (pilots are ongoing) and some early adopter districts have trained staff members collecting samples from younger children during, for example, mask breaks.

What is classroom-based pool testing?

Classroom-based pool testing involves test samples being collected by students and their teacher.

In a hybrid setting, classroom pool testing would occur for each student once per week. For the K-8 schools, samples would be collected twice - once for each cohort (for example, Monday for cohort A and Thursday for Cohort B). At the high school, testing would occur once per week, when each cohort starts their in-person learning.

What happens if a positive test is returned within a pool?

If a pooled sample results in a positive test, further testing of samples from individuals in the pool occurs to determine which individual(s) within that pool are positive for COVID-19.

- Some companies are able to “reflex test” samples already taken, meaning that these original samples are individually tested for the presence of the Coronavirus
- Some testing programs (like the DESE pilot) do not have this ability. In this case, the individuals within the pool submit new samples for diagnostic testing with a test kit from an alternative source.

For the DESE testing program, individuals in the positive pool would be isolated/quarantined for as brief a period of time as possible until they can submit new samples for individual diagnostic testing. The follow-up testing would most likely involve BinaxNOW antigen test kits by Abbott Labs that DESE has recently piloted in some schools. Students and staff would be permitted to come into school for the purpose of follow up testing.

Upon return of a positive test, the individual(s) would be isolated per CDC and DPH guidance. Close contacts would be determined through contact tracing and quarantined per CDC and DPH guidance. The remaining individuals from that pool would be able to return to the classroom setting upon receipt of a negative test result.

How will the testing program be funded?

DESE has secured a competitive price for this testing program and is paying for the initial six weeks of the testing program. Districts will have the opportunity to continue with testing for cost after that. Franklin Public Schools would seek to use a portion of the next round of Federal stimulus funding to support a surveillance/diagnostic testing program.

Are pooled test results reported to the Department of Public Health?

The results of a pooled PCR test are not required to be reported to the Department of Public Health. Individual diagnostic tests (whether positive or negative) done following a positive pool test must be reported to the Department of Public Health.

When is the timeframe for implementation?

Wednesday, January 13, 2021 -- Surveys to families and faculty/staff

Wednesday, January 13, 2021 -- Q and A session for faculty/staff at 3:00 PM

Thursday, January 14, 2021 -- Family webinar at 7 PM

Tuesday, January 19, 2021 -- Survey responses due

End of January/early February -- Training of faculty and staff; ongoing communication with families including obtaining consent

Pilot begins late January/early February - pending additional information from DESE