



## **Methuen Public Schools Determination of Phases of Learning Environments and Partial or Full Closure of Grade level, School, or District Updated 11/11/2020**

### **Guidance from Department of Elementary and Secondary Education as of 11/6/2020**

With the recent update by the Department of Public Health (DPH) to the weekly color-coded designation for communities in the Commonwealth, the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) is issuing updated guidance on interpreting these metrics for school settings. This replaces the guidance on *Interpreting DPH COVID-19 Health Metrics* issued on August 11, 2020.

With the change to the color-coded metrics, a community's designation of gray, green, yellow or red now takes into account the size of the community, positive COVID-19 cases per 100,000 residents and the percent of tests conducted in a community that are positive.

DESE is making updates to its initial guidance on interpreting these metrics in school settings based on a growing body of evidence that students should remain in school. With numerous examples of schools reopening from around the world, across the country, and recent first-hand experience here in Massachusetts, it is increasingly clear that schools are not sources of significant COVID transmission, so long as proper health and safety protocols are followed. This has held true in Massachusetts even as we have seen an uptick in COVID-19 cases statewide, further indicating that with strong health and safety protocols, schools are able to operate safely for in-person learning. Moreover, we continue to observe the significant harms that come with keeping students out of school in terms of their academic progress and social emotional and physical health.

As such, after consultation with our medical advisors and public health experts, we are updating our guidance as follows. As always, districts and schools must strictly adhere to all health and safety protocols outlined in DESE Fall Reopening Guidance. All individuals who are symptomatic, receive a positive COVID-19 diagnosis or are a close contact of a COVID-19 positive individual must continue to follow the protocols outlined in DESE's Guidance on Responding to COVID-19 Scenarios.

- Districts are expected to prioritize in-person learning across all color-coded categories, unless there is suspected in-school transmission, in accordance with DESE's *Guidance on Responding to COVID-19 Scenarios*. Transmission in schools is defined as spread of the virus between people during interactions in the school setting. While there have been positive COVID-19 cases of staff and students in schools, most of these infections have occurred outside of the school setting. **If there is suspected in-school transmission, then the affected classrooms or schools should temporarily shift to remote learning, in accordance with DESE's *Guidance on Responding to COVID-19 Scenarios*.** Classrooms and schools should reopen after appropriate mitigation strategies have been implemented, as determined in consultation with the local board of health, DPH, and DESE.
- 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. Parents and caregivers will continue to have the option to choose a district's remote learning program for their children.
- Schools in red communities should implement hybrid models, while maximizing in-person learning time for high-needs students.
- In those communities with the highest COVID-19 caseloads and test positivity rates (e.g. currently, Chelsea, Lawrence, and Revere), DESE and DPH will work with local school officials to develop and implement customized strategies to reduce in-school health risks, to enable as many children as possible to attend school in person and/or make a determination on the need for fully remote learning.
- Fully remote instructional models should be implemented only as a last resort in classrooms, schools, or districts when there is suspected in-school transmission or a significant municipal outbreak, in accordance with DESE's *Guidance on Responding to COVID-19 Scenarios*. Classrooms and schools should reopen after appropriate mitigation strategies have been implemented, as determined in consultation with the local board of health, DPH, and DESE.

As a reminder, structured learning time requirements for students and related regulatory and statutory standards remain in effect for school districts, regardless of learning model.

### [Protocols for Determination of Learning Phases and Short Term Closures for Methuen Public Schools- based on DESE and DPH guidance](#)

Each Thursday morning the Chair of the School Committee, the Superintendent, the Methuen DPH Leader, and the Methuen Public Schools Nurse Leader will review the following to determine any large scale district or school phase changes (i.e. from hybrid to remote and remote to hybrid):

1. State metric for Methuen for previous 14 days including number of <19 cases and positivity rate
2. Determine if there are any new municipal outbreaks.
3. COVID positive data for each school for previous week - Wednesday to Wednesday.

4. Number of classrooms quarantined and/or number of close contacts within a school from each case.
5. Whether there is suspected in-school transmission *beyond one cohort or a small number of cohorts* (Per DESE Guidelines).
6. If there are multiple cases in multiple schools.
7. An email notice sent to the district community and a notice on our webpage will be posted and will go out each Thursday evening to inform parents of either continued learning phase beginning on Monday the following week or a change in learning phase for the following week.

#### **Determination of Phase for Classroom PK-8:**

1. The school principal, school nurse, and nurse leaders will consult upon receiving a positive COVID case of a student or staff member.
2. With the identification of a positive case in one room either a student or a staff the classroom will be required to engage in a 14-day quarantine period.
3. All families will be notified by the school informing them of being identified as a close contact.
4. The families will be notified that the classroom will be remote for the 14 day quarantine period.

#### **Determination of Phase for School or Grade Level:**

1. Superintendent, Principals, and Methuen Board of Health Director, Nurse Leader will consult Thursday morning regarding confirmed positive COVID cases and the number of close contacts from quarantined classrooms and/or staff.
2. If the number of cases and number of staff or students quarantined result in the inability to function in-person the school/grade level may close for the duration of a 14-day quarantine period.
3. If there is suspected in-school transmission *beyond one cohort or a small number of cohorts* the school/grade level may close for the duration of a 14-day quarantine period.
4. All families will be notified by the superintendent of a learning phase change on Thursday afternoon to begin the following Monday.
5. The Mobile Response Team will be contacted.