



Marblehead Public Schools Return to School, 2021-22

August 20, 2021



Good People of Marblehead:

Thank you for your patience and support as we tackle some of the most complex yet important educational challenges of our time.

The past 18 months have been exceptionally challenging for members of our community. Our educators, our students, and our families have learned and grown from these experiences. Our pandemic recovery plans will recognize and address the trauma and impact of the pandemic, taking into account the unique experiences of individual students and families.

My top priority for the 2021-22 school year is to offer an uninterrupted, in-person learning experience. To accomplish this, we will monitor health and safety guidelines from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), Massachusetts Department of Public Health (MDPH), and Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE). We will also continue to work closely with the Marblehead Board of Health Director and our exemplary school nurses to understand local and state statistics relative to COVID-19 prevalence and vaccination rates in our community (both favorable at this time).

While we will work to ensure as much consistency and stability as possible, flexibility will continue to be paramount. Tracking the data and constant collaboration will allow protocol optimization and help us to provide the safest possible learning environment. The protocols and procedures contained in this document are subject to change throughout the year, and in the event that adjustments are necessary (or that guidance changes at the local, state, or national level) we will do our very best to communicate in a clear and timely manner.

We hope you enjoy the rest of your summer, and we look forward to welcoming you back very soon.

Sincerely,

John J. Buckey

Dr. John Buckey
Superintendent of Schools
Marblehead Public School District



Guiding Principles

These guiding principles were developed in 2020-21 with input from all MPS stakeholder groups and the community. They represent the key values that drive our return to full in-person instruction.

1. **Welfare, safety and health.** We will track and follow federal (CDC) and state-mandated (MDPH) and DESE guidelines. We will consult with medical, public health, MHD Board of Health and school health experts to adopt practices that ensure these three principles - welfare, health and safety - are maintained.
2. **Educational excellence.** We will maintain and ensure high-caliber teaching and learning consistent with the Marblehead Public Schools experience. We will hold ourselves to the highest standards in both domains.
3. **Social-emotional support.** After eighteen months of uncertainty for both students and staff, we will innovate in order to develop new ways to support emerging challenges. We will continue the delivery of critical student support services.
4. **Equity.** We will be intentional on matters of addressing the needs of all students, including our most vulnerable populations. We are committed to expanding access to tools, technology and support in order to ensure equity and access to robust learning at all levels.
5. **Communication.** We will continue to ensure that information is readily available and updated as needed. We will seek feedback to improve our communication tools and make decision-making transparent.
6. **Flexibility and fluidity.** As we move through the return of full in-person instruction, we know we might have to make adaptations or amendments. We reserve the right to adjust these plans at any time given the trajectory of COVID-19 in our community or across the state, budgets and other factors.
7. **PPI (presume positive intentions).** We must renew our commitment to presume positive intentions and remain open-minded to the perspectives of our colleagues, neighbors and friends, keeping what's best for students at the heart of our decision-making.



Full District In-Person Learning

Per DESE, “all districts and schools will be required to be in-person, full-time, five days a week, and all DESE health and safety requirements will be lifted.

This includes all physical distancing requirements. Districts are no longer able to offer remote learning as a standard learning model. Pathways that existed prior to the pandemic for offering virtual learning to individual students in limited cases will remain available to districts and schools. These include home/hospital tutoring programs due to a documented medical condition and other narrow circumstances.”

Marblehead is fortunate in this transition because a majority of our district’s students attended full in-person days of instruction to end the 2020-21 school year. We have done full, in-person school already and we know how to successfully inhabit our buildings while applying necessary safety protocols.

That being said, we fully recognize that the removal of the remote learning option impacts over 200 Marblehead students. We are mindful of the unique re-entry these students face and we are dedicated to supporting their return to in-person instruction. Principals are creating options for school tours and other familiarization opportunities and teachers will be aware of which students were fully remote in 2020-21.



Mitigation Strategies

- **DISTANCING:** During Spring and Summer 2020, principals conducted classroom-by-classroom site and resource feasibility work to understand how to safely accommodate students and staff.
 - We analyzed air handling and filtration system capacity to ensure adequate, safe, and high quality ventilation in teaching spaces.
 - We identified additional space in which to separate sick students from well students, and in which to care for students or staff in the event they become sick during the day.
 - We determined that we could reach the student and adult capacity of most classrooms in the district with three-foot physical distancing. We returned to full in-person instruction last spring with three-foot spacing in place, and we return to school this fall with the same capacity to keep all students, for the most part and in most instances, spaced three feet apart.
 - As always, where we can maximize the distance we will endeavor to do so as a purposeful mitigation strategy.
 - Physical distancing will be prioritized while eating indoors and during defined activities.
- **MASKING:** Consistent with our approach in 2020-21, we form masking recommendations with an eye to guidance from DESE, Massachusetts Department of Public Health (MDPH) and the Marblehead Board of Health and its Director.
 - As of this writing, the Commissioner is seeking **DESE** approval to mandate mask wearing in K-12 schools throughout the Commonwealth until at least October 1. They meet on Tuesday, August 24th to formalize this recommendation. If DESE mandates mask wearing, we will oblige.
 - Currently, **MDPH** strongly recommends that all students in grades K-6 mask indoors, except those who cannot do so due to medical conditions or behavioral needs.
 - The **Marblehead Board of Health** and the **Marblehead Health Dept** recommends that masks be strongly recommended indoors for students and staff in grades K-6, except those who cannot do so due to medical conditions or behavioral needs, and that masks be strongly recommended indoors for students and staff in grades 7-12, and for all visitors to school buildings.
 - Masks are required for all students and staff, vaccinated or unvaccinated, on school buses and in school health offices.
 - As a community, we will be deliberate in normalizing mask wearing for any students and staff for whom it is either required or strongly recommended. Bullying associated with mask wearing will not be tolerated.
 - In alignment with the [statewide advisory on masking](#), masks are not necessary outdoors and may be removed while eating indoors.



- We will use [thresholds to make adjustments to our masking recommendations or requirements](#). These thresholds will be developed in partnership with the Marblehead Health Department and the Superintendent’s Medical Advisory Committee.
- **DIAGNOSTIC TESTING:** During 2020-21, DESE and the Executive Office of Health and Human Services (EOHHS) introduced COVID19 screening and diagnostic testing in the school setting. They have expanded the program for the 2021-2022 school year and Marblehead has been accepted with priority standing. Administrative training is underway and all school nurses will be

Testing services included in COVID-19 Testing Program		
Symptomatic Testing <ul style="list-style-type: none">• For when individuals present symptoms while at school; individuals should not go to school if experiencing symptoms while at home• Samples are collected at school using the BinaxNOW rapid antigen test• Those testing negative with isolated/mild symptoms can stay in school	“Test and Stay” Close contact testing <ul style="list-style-type: none">• For when individuals are in close contact with a COVID-19 positive individual while at school.• Samples are collected at school using the BinaxNOW rapid antigen test• Tests are administered daily for at least five days from the date of exposure	Routine COVID Pooled Testing <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Routine Pooled Testing and <u>School-Based Follow-Up Testing</u>; samples are collected at school; if a pool is positive, follow-up testing at school with either BinaxNOW and/or individual PCR testing as necessary• Routine Pooled Testing and <u>Lab-Based Follow-Up Testing</u>; samples are collected; if a pool is positive, individual Follow-Up testing occurs at the lab, without a second sample collection

trained to administer the program. We are also hiring a Covid Coordinator to work with state appointed support personnel for Marblehead on all of the logistics of the program.

- **CONTACT TRACING & QUARANTINE:** Close contacts are defined as individuals who have been within 6 feet of a COVID-19 positive individual while indoors, for at least 15 minutes during a 24-hour period.^{1 2} Please note that the at-risk exposure time begins 48 hours prior to symptom onset (or time of positive test if asymptomatic) and continues until the time the COVID-19 positive individual is isolated. In general, close contacts should follow the testing and quarantine response protocols. However, certain close contacts are exempted from testing and quarantine response protocols as noted in the following [DESE guidance document](#).

¹ Note: To be a close contact, the 15 minutes must occur within a 24-hour period. Multiple brief or transitory interactions (less than a minute) throughout the day are unlikely to result in 15 minutes of cumulative contact and do not meet the definition of close contact.

² <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/operation-strategy.html>



- **VACCINATION:** We urge all those eligible for the vaccine to please: get vaccinated! Toward this end we will continue to offer vaccination clinics throughout the year in partnership with the Marblehead Health Department.
 - In addition to recommending COVID-19 vaccination, it continues to be essential that as many children and adults as possible receive flu vaccines this fall. This will reduce the number of students who need to stay home due to illness.

- **OTHER MITIGATION EFFORTS:** Massachusetts has among the highest vaccination rates of any state in the nation, and evidence continues to reinforce that the COVID-19 vaccines are highly effective, especially against severe disease.³ Even for those students not yet vaccinated, the apparent risk of COVID-19 to children remains small.^{3 4} Even so, we will continue to engage best practices with regard to using MERV 13 filters, air purifiers, and enhanced ventilation.
 - The district has invested in acquiring individual air purifiers for any educator who wants one in his/her classroom or office and will continue to provide them.
 - In larger spaces, multiple purifiers are in use.
 - Open windows and outdoor learning are encouraged.
 - We will once again have tents at each school to encourage our students and staff to be outside whenever possible.

³ <https://www.mass.gov/info-details/covid-19-response-reporting>

⁴ <http://dx.doi.org/10.15585/mmwr.mm6914e4>



At a glance...

	End of 2020-21	Start of 2021-22
Distancing	Minimum of 3-foot physical distancing, more distance wherever possible	Same as 2020-21
Masking	Masks required in schools for all students and staff. Not required outdoors or when eating.	PENDING DESE DECISION - see MASKING section above.
Hygiene & Hand Washing	Hand sanitizer in each classroom and hand sanitizing stations in all buildings. Promoted the importance of regular hand washing.	Same as 2020-21 - strongly encouraged, signage to promote it and hand sanitizing stations throughout the buildings, in classrooms and offices.
Testing	Spring pool testing program pilot program.	Comprehensive COVID19 screening & diagnostic testing program, including real-time testing and response for symptomatic people, “test and stay” close contact testing, and routine pooled testing.
Vaccination	2 vaccination clinics at MVMS.	1 vaccination clinic this summer. Will offer clinics this fall and monitor “booster” clinic needs.
Contact Tracing	Close contacts identified and notified. School-level alerts issued when a COVID case has occurred. District case dashboard updated regularly.	Same as 2020-21, except that certain close contacts are exempted from testing and quarantine response protocols as noted in the following DESE guidance document .
Quarantine	Followed guidance provided by CDC, DESE and MDPH.	DESE has issued revised quarantine guidance this year. It is outlined in the following DESE guidance document .
Daily Health Attestation	Students and families expected to review health attestation each day before arrival.	Similar to 2020-21 but with an updated symptom checklists: Student Attestation , Staff Attestation
Other Mitigation Protocols	Individual air purifiers available for educators’ classrooms or offices. Multiple purifiers running in larger spaces. Encouraged open windows & outdoor learning. Outdoor learning areas and/or tents at each school.	Same as 2020-21



Social Emotional Learning

We know that a full return to in-person learning will require special attention to meeting the social-emotional needs of staff and students.

The District will leverage the past efforts of employing community building meetings and Positive Behavior Intervention Systems (PBIS) to continue providing opportunities for staff and students to develop self-awareness, social awareness, relationship building, and problem-solving skills. Some of the goals for social-emotional learning will be as follows:

- Support the transition of all students by building strong relationships and community.
- Teach executive functioning skills students will need.
- Support social-emotional learning needs through targeted assessments and interventions..

Social-emotional learning opportunities will be built into the schedule for each day. Each day at the elementary level will begin with a community meeting to serve as a Social-Emotional Learning check-in for all students. At the secondary level, all classes will start with opportunities for a social-emotional learning check-in.

Additionally, schools will also make efforts to include school-wide community-building events, which might include special speakers and grade-level assemblies to help the students feel connected to the school as a whole. It is expected that clubs and activities will occur out of school time in person. Fall athletics will have already begun.

Teachers will plan to make use of a variety of formative and summative assessments that will include online platforms and other options. These assessments will help teachers to determine the needs of their students and the ability to communicate concerns or issues with families and the appropriate support services personnel.



FAQs

1. Where can I find more information on the health and safety protocols that are being recommended in light of the Delta variant of the virus?

- 07-19-2021: American Academy of Pediatrics recommends a “layered approach to make school safe for all students, teachers, and staff.” [The AAP’s guidance](#) “includes a recommendation that everyone older than age 2 wear masks, regardless of vaccination status.”
- 07-27-2021: The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) suggest a return to indoor mask-wearing in this [CDC guidance](#), stating that the “CDC recommends universal indoor masking for all teachers, staff, students, and visitors to schools, regardless of vaccination status.”
- 07-30-2021: In collaboration with the Massachusetts Department of Public Health (MA DPH), the Commissioner of Education released this [new guidance](#) for PK-12 public schools. Governor Baker spoke in support of the Commissioner’s recommendation later in the day.

2. The guidance from the AAP, the CDC, and the MDPH is inconsistent. What are the health and safety rules that MPS will follow in the upcoming school year?

Governor Baker noted that Massachusetts has one of the highest vaccination rates in the country, which may account for the variation in the approach to back to school guidance. Marblehead’s vaccination rate is very high. Marblehead Public Schools have tried to consistently follow the guidance from the DESE and MDPH; in an effort to avoid confusion and keep students in school, we will continue to do so.

3. Will MPS require additional physical distancing when we return to school?

No. We will do our best to maintain maximum physical distances when eating, but there are no other physical distancing requirements for the upcoming school year. In most instances, we are able to maintain a three feet physical distance in our classrooms.

4. Is physical distancing still required at lunch time or when we are eating?

In the new school year, everyone will return to in-person learning and remote learning is no longer an option. These changes increase pressure on existing space in our schools, making it more challenging to physically distance children when eating. Outside remains an excellent option for eating whenever possible.



Children under the age of 12 are unvaccinated, and the new variants, breakthrough cases, and other unknowns make it important to increase physical distances during food consumption whenever possible. Inclement weather is one of our greatest challenges in schools, and our principals and educators will do their best to maintain greater physical distances when eating whenever possible.

Building principals have been working with the Directors of Food Service and Facilities and will be sharing specific lunch plans with families at the building level.

5. Will there be assigned seating this year?

Yes. Whenever possible, seats will be assigned, and we recommend keeping students in desks rather than tables for now. In some cases it may be necessary to use tables. We must continue our contact tracing efforts, so assigned seating in classrooms and on buses remains important.

6. My child is immunocompromised and in-person learning does not feel safe to me. Is there a remote option this year?

Unfortunately, remote learning is no longer an option in the upcoming school year per the Commissioner of Education. Please refer to the DESE COVID-19 guidance issued on May 27, 2021, page 4: *Districts will no longer be able to offer remote learning as a standard learning model. As noted above, districts and schools will be required to be in-person, full-time, five days a week this fall.*

Pathways that existed prior to the pandemic for offering virtual learning to individual students in limited cases will remain available to districts and schools. These include home/hospital tutoring programs due to a documented medical condition, 3 single district virtual schools, and other narrow circumstances.

7. Will Marblehead Public Schools continue to participate in a SY22 COVID-19 testing program?

Yes, it is an expanded program and we have been accepted into the program through a priority application process.



8. Will we ever get to attend school without strict health and safety measures in place?

Yes! One way to get this pandemic behind us is by following our “do your part” recommendation and get fully vaccinated as soon as it is available to you and make sure you are not sending sick students to school.

9. Will masks be required on school buses?

Yes. Passengers and drivers must wear a mask on school buses. In addition, all MPS school buses must have windows open at least 4 inches at all times. For more information, here is the [CDC's order](#).

10. What are the current travel restrictions? Will I be able to travel out of state without a quarantine?

[Massachusetts COVID-19 Travel Guidance](#) suggests that if you are vaccinated there are no restrictions on domestic travel, and you can travel freely.

Here are the CDC's recommendations for [unvaccinated people](#), including a viral test 3-5 days after and self-quarantine for a full 7 days after travel. Since children under the age of 12 are ineligible for a vaccine, we anticipate that many families will have questions about the rules. We ask all MPS families and staff to please follow the State's travel guidance. Qualifying special conditions include serious family emergencies/illnesses, deaths, and custody arrangements. If you have questions, please contact your principal or school nurse.

11. If a student or staff member is sick and experiencing symptoms, such as fever, cough, runny nose, what should they do?

School Personnel:

Every day prior to coming to work staff will be asked to complete an [attestation of wellness](#). If a staff member has any symptoms, they should call their supervisor and report the symptoms and stay home from school.

Staff should follow up with their Health Care Provider for further evaluation and testing. They will be allowed to return to school based on their symptoms, further evaluation, and clearance from the Marblehead Health Dept/School Nurse. Staff who become ill while at school will be sent home immediately.



Students and Families:

Before coming to school or getting on the bus: Families should assess their child's state of wellness before leaving home for school. It is expected that each family will assess each of their children every day for symptoms by using this checklist before the child comes to school. [Here is the form](#) for families to use to assess each of their children, every day before school.

If the student has any symptoms of COVID-19, they should stay home from school. The family should notify their school nurse that the child will be absent and the reason for the absence. The school nurse will follow-up with the family regarding the child's symptoms, when the child was seen by a medical professional and any testing that was done. The child can return to school once cleared by the school nurse and/or the Marblehead Board of Health.