

DRAFT-School Program Values and Models for APS Fall 2020

Table of Contents

[Elementary Principal's Message](#)

[Reflection on Values](#)

[Guiding Values for Returning to School](#)

[Fall 2020 Elementary Learning Program Options](#)

[Model #1 Full In-School Learning Program with Restrictions](#)

[Model #2 Hybrid Learning](#)

[Frequency Model - 2 days \(aa, bb or ab, ab\) Monday, Wednesday, or Friday CPT/PD and Intervention/Service](#)

[Model #3-Remote Learning \(All Students\)](#)

[Community Engagement and Collaborative Decision Making](#)

Elementary Principal's Message

On June 25, 2020, the State released its [Initial Fall Reopening Guidance](#) with plans to deliver additional school guidance in July. In brief, the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (MA DESE) encouraged districts across the state to study the current conditions of their schools with the desire of having students return to school in the fall. This requires students and staff to maintain social distances of three to six feet throughout the day to the extent possible, to wear face-masks (grades 2-12), and to significantly minimize the amount of movement and interaction that takes place during a traditional school day. The guidance provided by the MA DESE and [endorsed by medical professionals](#), sets the expectation that the benefits of children returning to school this fall, while minimizing risk, outweighs the potential health risks according to the research gathered on COVID-19, at this point.

The Arlington community has continued to see COVID-19 mitigation efforts prevail. Families can view the most up-to-date data on the [Town of Arlington COVID-19 Data Dashboard](#). Arlington families have done their part these past few months to reduce the spread of the virus. Our community has committed to limiting interactions, staying at

home, and wearing face masks when social distancing wasn't feasible. Experts agree, a safe reopening to school isn't just about the adjustments a school makes. It's also about how much virus is circulating in the community, which affects the likelihood that students and staff will bring COVID-19 into their classrooms.

The Arlington Public School administrative team has considered the guidance from the state, the current climate and context within the Arlington community, as well as the mounting research and advice from the science community. Key to this plan will be the ability for staff and students to:

- maintain 3ft to 6ft of social distancing across the school day
- wear face masks and protective face coverings during the school day (with scheduled face mask breaks)
- remain in small classroom cohorts, with limited interaction between cohorts
- utilize the classroom for all core instruction, including specials (art, PE, music, library) and lunch
- regularly wash hands across the school day and frequently disinfect all used surfaces

As you can imagine, the finer details of a regular in-person school day, even with the State's guidance, will be complex and very challenging for students and staff. At the same time, we also recognize that we may experience a resurgence of the virus, and we must prepare for the possibility that learning will shift quickly to entirely remote, if needed. Throughout the time of school closure, we took note of what worked and what did not in the remote learning environment. We learned a great deal about how to navigate remote learning and how to engage our learners. If we return to remote learning for all students at any point during the year, it will be a different experience than it was before with more time dedicated to synchronous direct instruction and live experiences between student and school staff. We appreciate the feedback given by all families and teachers/staff. Our partnership is what will keep our programming strong.

The final decision on the APS Elementary Fall 2020 Learning Program will be made collaboratively by educational leaders in Arlington, together with the School Committee, and will be shared with families and staff in early August. This timing is based on a request made by the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) to each of the school districts in Massachusetts. A draft of three plans must be submitted to DESE by July 31, 2020.

An overview of the three learning program options being considered (*full in person, hybrid, remote*) are outlined in this document. We have a series of questions to pose to our school community to assist in finalizing details of each option.. We will also share a brief survey with the entire community. We thank everyone who has shared their perspectives and ideas with us up to this point.

Reflection on Values

Throughout our return to school planning process, we have identified Guiding Values to drive our decision-making. The most important is the health, safety, and well-being of our school community.

Guiding Values for Returning to School

- Health, safety, and well-being of our students, staff, and families above all else.
- Equity will remain at the core of our work as we design learning programs for students.
- We will support student and staff social-emotional well-being, acknowledging that the school experience will be very different when compared to previous years.
- We will consider the strengths and limitations of returning to school for all stakeholders: students, families, staff and community, and build in continued flexibilities.
- We will need to be flexible and fluid in how we deliver instruction to ensure that we address student learning in age-appropriate ways.
- Ensure that plans are sustainable and take into account the mental, physical, social, and emotional needs of the school community.
- We recognize the continued investment needed in professional development to support our staff in creating engaging, high-quality, digital learning environments.

There is a growing body of research proving that social and emotional learning (SEL) is fundamental to academic success. SEL must be woven into the work of every teacher,

in every classroom if we truly want to prepare all our students for college and careers. We know the COVID-19 pandemic has created different types of traumatic experiences and high levels of stress for many of our staff, students, and families. This experience emphasizes the importance of social-emotional well-being for all.

In our response to the COVID-19 pandemic, it is critically important to place student and adult wellness first to establish a positive, safe, and supportive learning environment. Leading with SEL is essential because children need social and emotional support as they, like the adults around them, navigate the unprecedented challenges of alternative learning contexts, and because SEL helps students access academic content through building essential self-management skills, resilience, and connections.

As school leaders, we recognize that the opportunity gap that existed for some groups of students prior to March 2020 will likely widen. All of our re-entry plans take that into consideration and will guide the planning process. In practice, this means that some students may be in school more frequently than others and some students may have higher levels of support than others. We believe this allows us to remain true to our goal of achieving educational equity for students.

We also feel it is essential to maintain our commitment to equity and anti-racist practices during the Covid-19 pandemic and beyond. This is also supported in the Governor's [back to school guidance](#).

Fall 2020 Elementary Learning Program Options*

Continuum of In-Person Learning Program - Elementary (K-5)	
Full Return Program	All Students In School <ul style="list-style-type: none">● 18-24 students per classroom● 3' minimum distancing for most of day● 6' minimum distance required for lunch and mask breaks● Most challenging environment to maintain health and safety measures● Provides for most in person teaching opportunities● Most changes when compared to a student traditional learning day

Hybrid Program	½ Time In-Person, ½ Time Remote <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● 9-12 total students/class ● 6' minimum distancing throughout the day ● Improved ability to maintain health and safety measures ● Compromise between in-person and remote learning ● When learning remotely, students will receive live instruction, digital content, and independent work
Full Remote Program	All Students Fully Remote <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● All classes taught remotely by in-person staff ● To be used only if public health concerns preclude in-person learning ● Least advantageous for learning and social-emotional support

Remote Learning Program	
K-5 (Optional) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Reserved for families that do not wish to send their student back to school in-person ● 25-30 students per “classroom” ● Designated Elementary Teachers ● Secondary teaching responsibilities shared by in-person staff 	

**Note-this is the 30,000 ft view and the details are currently being ironed out, especially when it comes to health and safety. We will include information from the Department of Health in our documentation and will include safety guidelines and procedures.*

Model #1 Full In-School Learning Program with Restrictions

If public health guidelines were to relax physical distancing requirements across the school day, schools may be able to increase the number of students who can be present in our schools. This would allow all students to attend school in-person each day. Though school will look and feel different than what students are used to, our goal is to adhere to all safety recommendations.

Safety equipment/ considerations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● All students and staff will be required to wear masks inside the building
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● All students will be required to wash their hands multiple times throughout the day, including at arrival and dismissal. ● Teachers/staff will be provided a PPE kit with masks, face shield, and gloves ● Building hallways will be marked for one-way traffic/transition. ● May require arrival/dismissal considerations (<i>ex. possible staggered times</i>) ● Schools equipped with disinfecting “fogger” machines. ● Life-threatening food allergies will be considered as cleaning procedures are put in place (<i>in consultation with the school nurse</i>) ● Students will primarily remain in their homerooms with teachers to limit student interaction between cohorts
Classroom capacity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Traditional classrooms of 18-24 students <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Larger cohorts would require repurposing larger spaces (<i>gym, cafeteria, library, art, music room</i>) ● 3 ft minimum social distancing with masks K-5
Lunch	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Cafeteria capacity of 18-22 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ <i>Addition of classroom and gym space would be required to fully accommodate lunch</i> ● Minimum 6ft social distancing, no masks
Mask breaks/ recess	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● This will require access to outside space - <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ <i>6ft of social distancing will require 5,000 to 10,000 sq ft</i> ○ <i>This assumes limited freedom of movement beyond dedicated personal space</i> ● Significant limitations to using inside space when accommodating 6ft distancing ● Tents could be an option for some buildings
Specials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Art, PE, Music, and Library/Digital Literacy will likely require in-person and remote options
Staffing considerations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Each class (cohort) will be assigned teachers and paraprofessionals who will make up learning communities. ● When considering the capacity of any given classroom, three adults were included (<i>based on the metric provided by DESE</i>)

Model #2 Hybrid Learning

Safety equipment/ considerations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● All students and staff will be required to wear masks inside the building ● Hand washing will be required at arrival and dismissal, hourly, and after eating ● Teachers/staff will be provided a PPE kit with masks, face shield, and gloves ● Building hallways will be marked for one-way traffic/transition. ● May require arrival/dismissal considerations (<i>ex. possible staggered times</i>) ● Schools equipped with disinfecting fogger machines ● Life-threatening food allergies will be considered as cleaning procedures are put in place (in consultation with the school nurse) ● Students would primarily remain in their homeroom to limit student interaction between cohorts
Classroom capacity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Classrooms of 9-12 students ● 6ft minimum social distancing throughout the school day
Lunch	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Students will be able to eat in cafeteria, classroom, and other available spaces as needed ● Minimum 6ft social distancing, no masks
Mask breaks/ recess	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● This will require access to outside space - <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ <i>6ft of social distancing will require 5,000 sq ft</i> ○ <i>This assumes limited freedom of movement beyond dedicated personal space</i> ● Cafeteria and gym spaces will be available for breaks and other purposes throughout the day
Specials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Art, PE, Music, and Library/Digital Literacy will likely require in-person and remote options
Staffing considerations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● All staff members will be assigned to a cohort of students

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| | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• For the adults, the cohort will include both students who are at home and those who are in school (<i>faculty will work in school every day</i>). |
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Frequency Model - 2 days (aa, bb or ab, ab) Monday, Wednesday, or Friday CPT/PD and Intervention/Service

In this model, students attend school for two set days each week in person and two set days each week remotely. Remote learning days will be a combination of live and recorded remote instruction, project based activities, and guided independent practice within the set school day schedule. Students will have scheduled access to school staff for support.

Students will attend school at every grade level, K-5. Each homeroom class will be broken into two cohorts (**a** and **b**). Each cohort will attend two in-person school days a week and two and a half remote school days. *For example, cohort a may always attend school on Monday and Tuesday, while cohort b attends on Thursday and Friday.*

The third day in the schedule is for work at home for the majority of students. This would include some live instruction, recorded content, and home practice. On this third day, other students who are considered high needs could attend school or receive support from a teacher remotely or in person for a portion of the day. The remaining portion of that day would be for educator professional development, collaborative work with colleagues and district coaches, student feedback, and managing virtual classrooms. This time will also be used to support the facilities cleaning and building improvements based on safety considerations.

Tuesday *would not* be an early release day, as in past years, but would be a full day.

In all versions of our plans in which students come to school, the arrival and departure times may need to be staggered.

Lunch and recess plans may also be adjusted based on social distancing guidelines.

Students and adults will be organized into cohorts, in compliance with health guidelines and to support contact tracing, as needed.

Pros:

- Schedule will be predictable for families and set for the year
- In these small groups, Social-Emotional Learning is accounted for and allows for more intimate connections to be built within the cohort among students and identified faculty members
- Allows ample space for students to keep a distance of 6 feet and additional space in the building to be used by staff and students to create some movement within the day
- Allows targeted time to be set aside for our students identified as high needs
- Provides a set time for teachers to participate in PD and common planning
- Fewer students in the buildings at one time may decrease the need for additional staffing
- More flexibility to have students on the same schedule as their siblings (*alphabetical by family last name*)

Cons:

- Students may require a greater level of support from families
- Logistically challenging to align schedules for families with children at different grade levels and in different schools. Students will not be able to be in school, in person, full time
- The ability for classroom teachers to connect synchronously with students at home during the remote learning days will be more difficult due to staffing limitations
- Time on learning will likely be impacted as students support their health and safety by washing their hands frequently
- Students will need to carry materials back and forth from school most days

Model #3-Remote Learning (All Students)

In this model, students will be placed in fully remote classes. Instruction will be primarily synchronous with classroom teachers, with some time dedicated to guided independent work and recorded content, depending on age and ability. Under current guidelines, student schedules will include 5 hours per day of learning time and also include all specials (*art, music, PE, and library*).

It is our hope that as a community, we are able to be in school as much as possible, while promising the highest assurance of students and adult safety. However, this remote learning plan will be put in place for all students if schools need to remain

closed, as directed by the governor and MA DESE.

Community Engagement and Collaborative Decision Making

Each elementary school will begin to hear from stakeholder groups to gather feedback on the three proposed learning programs and to inform the creation of a FAQ. Our intention is to be completely transparent during this process and we invite anyone with questions or concerns to reach out to us at any time. Your child's building principal is the person to reach out to first. For staff members, your building principal is also the first person to contact with questions, ideas, and/or concerns.

Preamble to our focus groups - *Please preview these questions and then revisit them after you have had a chance to read through the information included here on the plans for the 2020-2021 school year. The information provided is intentionally designed to be simple and we hope it will be easily understood (before school starts again, the finer details of the final plan will be communicated). We will collect your responses to the following questions and they will help to inform the decisions made by APS leadership.*

- What are the circumstances that need to exist for you, as a parent/guardian, to/not to bring students to school? As a teacher/staff member to feel safe in returning to work?
- What are the most important safety guidelines to consider for in-school learning?
- What are the opportunities and challenges for students, families, and staff when considering the three proposed learning programs (*in-person, hybrid, full remote*)?
- Let's discuss the impact of 3 ft vs 6ft social distancing guidelines on the student school day? How will our students' days change given each scenario?
- Which parts of the day, programmatically, would work better virtually? For whom?

PPE Considerations

- Mask breaks will become a part of our routine in school. How long do you think these should last and how often do you think they should happen?
- Is there something you would like us to consider that we have not asked?

