Somerville Public Schools COVID-19 Transmission Prevention Plan

(This is a DRAFT document and will be updated as necessary to reflect policies passed by the Somerville School Committee.)

In response to the Coronavirus 2019 pandemic, the Governor of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts declared a State of Emergency on March 10, 2020, and the Mayor of the City of Somerville declared a State of Emergency on March 15, 2020, determining that the threat of COVID-19 poses a present, real, and imminent danger to public health, safety, and general welfare of the people of Somerville.

COVID-19 is easily transmitted, especially in indoor group settings, and it is essential that the spread of the virus be slowed to protect the ability of public and private health care providers to handle the influx of new patients and safeguard public health and safety. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention have advised that the spread of the disease from person to person is caused in part by respiratory droplets produced by infected persons and spread, e.g., via respiration, coughing or sneezing, and that people potentially can spread the disease even before they experience symptoms. Influenza (Flu) and COVID-19 are both contagious respiratory illnesses and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommend all persons aged six months and over who do not have contraindications receive the influenza vaccination.

The City of Somerville is the most densely populated city in the Commonwealth, and the risk of COVID-19 transmission remains an imminent threat. In-person learning poses unique risks based on the number of individuals in an indoor setting for extended periods of time. Somerville Public Schools' goal is for students and staff to return to a safe school environment that will mitigate the potential exposure to and transmission of SARS-CoV-2. Testing, contact tracing, isolation/quarantine is the most effective strategy to mitigate the spread of COVID-19. Public health experts have determined that robust and regular testing enables rapid and efficient contact tracing and isolation/quarantine.

The Somerville Board of Health passed an order on November 2, 2020 requiring all K-12 educational institutions in Somerville, including Somerville Public Schools, to submit to the Board of Health a COVID-19 transmission prevention plan that requires ongoing testing of all teachers, employees, and any other individuals providing services in the school building(s) and provides a detailed testing protocol to identify and swiftly isolate asymptomatic, pre-symptomatic, and symptomatic students who are COVID-19 positive. The Board of Health order allows for exemptions to COVID-19 testing in K-12 institutions only for those individuals who have a health contraindication documented by a physician.

Somerville Public Schools establishes herein its COVID-19 transmission prevention plan that encompasses all of its students- pre-kindergarten through twelfth grade.

The availability of in-person instruction and the district's in-person health and safety implementation guidelines will be determined and continually assessed using up-to-date data and guidelines provided by the Somerville Board of Health and Health and Human Services Department, Centers for Disease Control (CDC), Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE), and the Massachusetts Department of Health. When families select in-person instruction for their student(s), they agree to and understand the health and safety expectations as outlined by the district including but not limited to wearing a mask, participating in COVID-19 screening testing, and abiding by social distance and hygiene guidelines. COVID-19 screening testing will be non-invasive to the extent possible.

The SPS COVID-19 transmission prevention plan will be regularly reviewed by the COVID-19 Testing Working Group to ensure it is responsive to the status of COVID-19 transmission in Somerville Public Schools, the city, and the region. The COVID-19 Testing Working Group consists of SPS staff, including a school principal, members of the City of Somerville COVID-19 Incident Command System, and parent of an SPS student.

COVID-19 Testing

The Somerville School Committee set as policy the requirement that all faculty, staff, other employees, and any other individuals providing direct, in-person services in the Somerville Public School buildings will be tested as a baseline before in-person learning begins and through a regular screening protocol requiring testing twice a week thereafter as established by the COVID-19 transmission prevention plan.

The policy also requires that students will be tested as a baseline before they are permitted to return to school in person and through a regular screening protocol once a week thereafter.

When pooled testing is conducted, each classroom grouping will be tested as part of one pool. Teachers will be tested individually twice a week. Staff and other individuals who work across the school will be tested twice a week as determined by the other scheduled tests and test availability. Staff will either be tested in a pool or individually based on function.

The above policies will allow Somerville Public Schools to identify and swiftly isolate asymptomatic and pre-symptomatic individuals in the school population. Individuals who test positive for COVID-19 will be required to isolate for 10 days. Tests conducted will either be individual tests or pooled tests, where the samples from multiple individuals are tested as one group. A positive result for a pooled test will be treated as a presumptive positive result for each individual in that pool until individual PCR test results are returned. Individuals who are close contacts of a positive individual must quarantine for 14 days, including all individuals who are

part of a pooled test that returns a positive result. An exception to this may be made for staff only pools if it is determined that members of the pools did not spend more than 15 minutes together in a 24 hour period given their work functions. Exceptions will be determined by the HHS contact tracing staff. Classrooms whose pooled tests return a positive result will be moved to remote learning during their quarantine period.

A child or staff member shall be exempted from the requirement for mandatory COVID-19 testing if a nurse practitioner, physician, physician assistant or other health care professional provides a written document stating why it is not possible for the student to participate due to medical condition(s), disability, sensory concerns, tactile sensitivity, or other health or safety factors for the student or staff member to participate in COVID-19 testing. Such certification shall be submitted to the physician in charge of the school health program. If the physician in charge of the school health program does not agree with the opinion of the child's physician, the matter shall be referred to the Somerville Board of Health, whose decision will be final.

School nurses will screen symptomatic individuals based on guidance from the CDC and DESE. Individuals who screen positively for COVID-19 symptoms will be referred for testing. This may include their primary care provider, Cambridge Health Alliance (CHA) and/or the CHA/City of Somerville mobile COVID-19 testing clinic for testing. School nurses will assist individuals in setting up their appointments for testing.

The school nurses will work with the City of Somerville contact tracing program and the Director of Health and Human Services to ensure that appropriate contact tracing is followed and the information about positive cases will also be reported to the Massachusetts Department of Public Health's Massachusetts Virtual Epidemiologic Network (MAVEN) platform.

Nose and Mouth Covering Requirement

All individuals entering Somerville Public School buildings shall wear an appropriate face covering that covers their nose and mouth. Exceptions to this requirement will only be granted for medical reasons. To receive a medical exemption, the individual must provide written documentation of the need for the exemption from a nurse practitioner, physician, or physician assistant.

Social Distancing Protocols

All desks and tables within Somerville Public School buildings will be spaced six feet apart. All individuals will be required to remain six feet apart at all times.

Virus shields will be placed in high traffic areas.

Each school will be equipped with a wellness room that will be used to screen symptomatic individuals and separate them from other individuals while they await transportation from the school building.

Sanitation and Disinfection Protocols

Sinks and/or sanitizer stations will be placed in each classroom.

School custodial staff will sufficiently clean each school building daily using techniques and cleaning substances that are proven to kill the SARS CoV-2 virus.

Seasonal Flu Vaccine Requirement

All students must receive an influenza vaccine per the Massachusetts School Immunization Requirements 2020-2021§. Massachusetts school immunization requirements are created under authority of 105 CMR 220.000 Immunization of Students Before Admission to School. In Somerville, this vaccine must be received prior to returning for in-person learning.

All teachers, staff, and any other individuals providing services in the Somerville Public School buildings must receive an influenza vaccine prior to returning for in-person learning per the CDC's recommendation.

Exemptions to the flu vaccine requirement will only be granted for documented medical reasons. To receive the medical exemption, the individual must provide a written statement from a physician stating that a vaccine is medically contraindicated for the individual. If the physician in charge of the school health program does not agree with the opinion of the child's physician, the matter shall be referred to the Somerville Board of Health, whose decision will be final.

Management of School Buses

A mask or face covering must be worn at all times by the driver, monitor (if present), and all students on a bus. A bus sanitization protocol will be developed by our transportation vendors and approved by the Superintendent's Office.