

Arlington Public Schools

District Plan for Resilient Pandemic Recovery and Reconnection
Fall 2021



Dear Arlington Public Schools Community,

I hope this message finds you enjoying a restful and restorative summer. As your new Superintendent of Schools, I am very much looking forward to meeting your students and their teachers in a few weeks. It has been clear to me since my first day that Arlington's students are surrounded by exceptionally talented and dedicated educators who respect and genuinely care about their students, in a community that deeply values the importance of excellent and equitable education. This commitment to Arlington's children is evident in the document that follows, which is the result of a collaborative effort of 98 teachers, service providers, families, and administrators across levels and roles.

This District Plan for Resilient Pandemic Recovery and Reconnection describes our approach to a successful and supportive return of all students to the Arlington Public Schools on September 9th, 2021. The committee identified **equity and inclusion, physical and emotional safety, academic excellence**, and **mental health** as their top priorities for refining a flexible system that will be able to quickly assess and respond to students' needs.

Our ultimate priority for the 2021-22 school year is to provide an uninterrupted in-person learning experience for all public school students in Arlington. This means that we will closely monitor all 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). It also means that we will track and share local and state statistics relative to the prevalence of COVID-19 and vaccination rates in our community. This will allow us to revise our protocols as necessary in order to provide the best possible learning experiences for students.

We acknowledge that the past 18 months have been extremely challenging for members of the Arlington community. We also know that we as educators, our students, and our families have learned and grown from our experiences over the past year and a half. We commit to ensuring that our pandemic recovery will neither negate the trauma and impact of the pandemic, nor make assumptions about the unique experiences of individual students and families.

Sincerely,



Elizabeth C. Homan, Ph.D.

Superintendent, Arlington Public Schools

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The APS Approach to Pandemic Recovery

We are committed to ensuring that we have the resources in place to provide students with flexible support as we return to school in 2021-22. **We recognize and acknowledge the following realities about the past year of schooling for our students:**

1. **Learning and teaching experiences were significantly impacted**, and impacted in different ways, for our students. These impacts include, but are not limited to:
 - a. Increased or decreased participation with and access to instruction;
 - b. Limited face-to-face social interaction with peers and development of social skills;
 - c. Increased anxiety or other mental health challenges;
 - d. Development and honing of new and different skills than students might have otherwise learned in school;
 - e. Interrupted academic learning or access to academic, social, and/or emotional services and support systems.
2. **Families were challenged with new and different responsibilities**, and were required to juggle many demands related to their children's social and academic learning with more limited resources. For example, and this list is not exhaustive:
 - a. Families struggled to find adequate childcare. Families shared with us in our Spring Panorama survey that only 40% of caregivers felt confident that they were able to support their child's education, and 41% wanted their child to have more time at school.
 - b. Caregivers noticed the impact of social separation from peers and teachers. 58% of families reported high levels of distraction and frustration from students.
 - c. Despite 89% of families feeling it is somewhat, quite, or extremely important for teachers to talk to students about major news events related to race and identity, only 37% of families expressed confidence in adults' abilities to have honest conversations with students about race.
3. **Arlington Public Schools teachers and staff were required to do their jobs in dramatically different ways.**
 - a. Teachers used new tools, resources, and pedagogies; as a result, they have gained new skills to apply to their teaching practice.
 - b. Some of our teachers were fully remote, and will be re-connecting with colleagues who they may not have seen in over a year.
 - c. All staff will require supportive opportunities to apply their new knowledge, to address the stressors of last year and the coming year, and to collaborate with colleagues.

We understand the above realities as opportunities to refocus, reimagine, and reconnect as a community. We wish to learn from our pandemic experience, such that we might return to full-time in-person schooling with a renewed sense of connection to one another and the important work of educating Arlington's youth. We understand that while the pandemic has laid bare inequities, wrought tragedy on families and communities, and significantly altered perspectives, we want to foster opportunities for all to heal, reflect, and learn from our individual and collective experiences.

Priorities for Successful Return and Reconnection

As we enter into the 2021-22 school year, we commit to the following priorities with renewed purpose, urgency, and focus:

- 1. All students will have access to equitable, inclusive and safe learning environments that uphold COVID-19 safety measures and protocols; support the mental, social and emotional health of students and staff; value diversity as an asset to learning and community; and promote social justice, healing and joy.**

The twin pandemics of COVID-19 and systemic racism require us to consider how we return to full-time, in-person school with equity and inclusion as central pillars of our recovery work. In Arlington, an equitable and inclusive approach to pandemic recovery means that all students will be provided with physically safe environments for learning and that necessary protocols will be in place to prevent the spread of COVID-19. It also means that we create environments where students' mental, social, and emotional health are understood as necessary conditions for academic excellence and success, and where we value the diverse racial, ethnic, ability, gender, language, and other identities of our students as assets to learning and reconnection.

[This is aligned with [2021-22 District Goal Objectives](#) 1.1, 1.2, 2.1, 2.2, 4.1, 4.2, 4.3]

- 2. Educators will collaborate, communicate, and partner with students and families to foster (re)connection and ensure a sense of belonging and community for all students, families, and staff.**

Teachers, administrators, families, and community partners have been more connected to one another this past 18 months than ever before. We will build on this momentum to ensure that we have two-way communication with families, strong school communities, and a sense of belonging for all of our students, regardless of whether they are joining us for their first year, their thirteenth year, or after a year and a half of remote learning.

[This is aligned with [2021-22 District Goal Objectives](#) 1.1, 1.2, 2.1, 2.2]

3. The APS will build upon and refine a flexible system to ensure all students are challenged and receive the academic, social, and emotional support necessary to thrive and succeed.

The past 18 months demonstrated just how flexible our approach to instruction can be when we work together on common needs. We have an opportunity to create systems that both ensure all students have access to grade-level curriculum and provide students with access to the just-in-time support they need to access the curriculum, for as long as they need it. This requires us to take a data-informed and values-driven approach to our work, collecting information about student progress so that we can provide resources when necessary. A multi-tiered approach to providing specific support to any and all students who demonstrate academic, social, or emotional need is central to this plan.

[This is aligned with [2021-22 District Goal Objectives](#) 1.1, 1.2, 2.1, 3.1, 3.2, 4.4]

How This Plan Was Developed

This plan was developed in the summer of 2021 in collaboration with members of the Arlington Public Schools Community, including families and parents of students, teachers and staff representing all levels and multiple roles, members of the community including town health department officials, and district and school administrators. The team met weekly from mid-July through August to collaboratively set priorities, engage in drafting, and provide input on planning. Members were divided into subcommittees based on interest and expertise, and subcommittees drafted each section of the plan. Central office leaders vetted and finalized plans in accordance with guidance from the Massachusetts Department of Public Health, Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, and in collaboration with Town of Arlington officials.

Communicating with the Community

Communication from schools and the district will include:

- (1) District Virtual Family and Caregiver Forums on 8/19 from 6:30-8:00pm, 8/25 from 7pm-8:30pm (Link Below).
- (2) School-based Virtual Forums according to the following schedule (Link Below):

School	Date	Time
Menotomy	September 2nd	5:30-6:30pm
Bishop	September 1st	6:30-7:30pm

Brackett	August 30th	6:30-7:30pm
Dallin	August 25th	5:30-6:30pm
Hardy	August 30th	5:30-6:30pm
Peirce	September 1st	5:30-6:30pm
Stratton	August 26th	5:30-6:30pm
Thompson	August 26th	6:30-7:30pm
Gibbs	August 31st	6:30-7:30pm
Ottoson	September 2nd	6:30-7:30pm
AHS	August 31st	5:30-6:30pm

- (3) Monthly updates from the Superintendent's Office to include any new information about changes in protocols, expectations, COVID case rates, or other relevant information, as well as information about upcoming events (such as back-to-school nights) at our schools.
- (4) Monthly updates from schools to inform families of any school-based adjustments to protocols or expectations.
- (5) As-needed updates from the Superintendent's office and schools in response to changes in state-level guidance, school-based protocols, or other critical information as it becomes available.

Forums listed above will be recorded and will be broadcast live in 6 languages (English, Spanish, Portuguese, Japanese, Chinese, and ASL) at the following link: <https://stream.lexikeet.com/arlington.k12.ma.us>

A Full Return to In-Person Learning and Teaching

We are committed to ensuring a full-time return to in-person learning and teaching this school year. [The APS School Calendar for 2021-22 can be accessed here](#). Please note the following start and end times for our schools:

- Menotomy Preschool: 8:30-2:00
- Elementary Schools: 8:10-2:30
- Gibbs School, Ottoson Middle School & Arlington High School: 8:30-2:56

Elementary early release will resume on Tuesdays; please see the school calendar for all other special dates, early releases, and holidays.

What follows are descriptions of the overarching frameworks that will guide our approach to teaching and learning as we return to school after our pandemic year. More specific action plans and priorities for each of our schools will be integrated into Annual School Improvement Plans and presented to the Arlington School Committee and shared with school communities this fall.

Data-Informed Core Instruction and Assessment

The goal for tier one core instruction is to ensure that all students receive **grade level curriculum** and the use of data to determine what supports will be provided to students should they show a need. In a [multi-tiered systems of support \(MTSS\)](#), tier one instruction is defined as the universal grade level curriculum all students receive. Within the MTSS framework, the needs of each student will be determined by the collection of various types of data that teachers will use to inform their instruction. Teams of educators will use the following data to inform and adjust instruction in our schools: academic assessment data, mental health screeners, social and emotional and climate surveys, student work, and teacher observations. The use of these data during team planning time will allow teacher teams to ensure that all students will be treated equitably and have what they need to achieve their highest potential.

The Core Instruction Subcommittee identified four domains needed to support a high quality robust tier-one instruction program: Collaboration, Data-Informed Practice, Curriculum and Instruction, and Professional Development. For the most part, the four components selected align with the approach outlined in the [Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education Acceleration Roadmaps](#) (DESE roadmaps). These roadmaps provide a foundation for how each component should be considered.

Collaboration

A concerted effort will be made by all Arlington staff to engage students and their families in two-way communication to build positive relationships and to solicit feedback about individual student needs. Families will be encouraged to provide information about their experiences over the last 18 months by conversing with instructional staff and attending district and building parent forums. Administrators and Instructional staff will collaborate to develop accurate and concrete plans to address the needs of students. This includes data meetings, department meetings, and teacher common planning time.

Action steps to support collaboration include:

- Providing multiple opportunities for teachers across and within grade levels and content areas to share practice;
- Providing time in the elementary master schedules for grade level teams to review and plan from data;
- Creating a leadership meeting structure which provides administrators time to meet together and with curriculum leaders/coaches and includes opportunities for administrators to conduct regular learning walks; and
- Engage in and evaluate the effectiveness of two-way communication and partnership with students and families.
- Continue to plan and invite parents to curriculum night opportunities for each building, and develop these opportunities in collaboration with families, teachers, and students, including collecting feedback on these efforts.

Data-Informed Practice

Data we collect provide a foundation for how the needs of each student will be determined. By creating a data-rich culture, teachers and support staff will be able to assess the knowledge and skills that each student was able to acquire over the last 18 months of instruction that was significantly impacted by the pandemic. Our goal is to take an asset-based approach when evaluating results from each data collection tool.

Action steps to support a data-informed culture include:

- The creation of a district-wide [Data Collection Calendar](#)
- Regular data meetings to inform instruction and identify individual student needs

Curriculum and Instruction

Curricula for each discipline will be adjusted based upon a review of the standards that teachers were able to cover over the past year. Curriculum leaders will continue to use [The Massachusetts](#)

[Frameworks](#) as a foundation for creating pacing guides which will outline the essential standards that students will need to learn for each content area and grade level. In addition to the use of the state frameworks, the equity and social-emotional learning (SEL) audit completed last year will also be central to curriculum planning. It is critical that students are exposed to instructional materials that are inclusive of their background and identity.

Action steps for planning Curriculum and Instruction include:

- Summer Curriculum Planning Workshops to assess where students are and update pacing guides to include the essential standards for each content area/grade level;
- Explicitly plan out the first six weeks of school to include a balance of assessment, instruction, and strategies to build positive relationships with students and their families;
- Ensure that all students will receive grade level instruction;
- Expand use of data to inform instruction to include student work, discussions, and peer interactions in addition to screeners, diagnostics, progress monitoring, and summative assessments;
- Build an antiracist curriculum by incorporating the recommendations found in the equity/SEL review of our instructional materials;
- Integrate social and emotional learning (SEL) approaches and resources into core instruction through both embedded and explicit SEL instruction.
- Continue the use of digital learning tools into our core instruction to assist with student engagement, data collection and supplementing classroom instruction. Examples include: Dreambox for math (Grades K-5), Lexia Core 5 (Grades K-5), IXL for reading and math (Grades 6-12), and Pear Deck.
- Assess the ways in which the tools listed above are used to enhance instructional practice in the in-person classroom.

Instructional Technology

All students K-12 will be provided with either an iPad (K-2) or a Chromebook (3-12) that they may use for instruction and take home at the end of each school day. More information about the technology tools that will be used for instruction is forthcoming. The use of instructional applications is intended as an enhancement to, not a replacement of, core instruction.

Students who kept their devices over the summer in 2021 should bring those devices back to school with them on the first day to ensure proper functionality of the device. We realize that this applies to most students and will re-inventory devices at the start of this school year without compromising student access to technology.

Professional Development

The goal for our professional development is to ensure that it is relevant to what all staff need to engage all students and provide equal access to tier one curriculum and instruction. Topics for professional development will be guided by district goals, school improvement plans, student learning and professional practice goals developed by teachers. Effective professional development can include, but is not limited to: workshops/webinars, outside consultants, participating in a book group, and/or taking a graduate level course.

Action Steps for Planning Effective and Relevant Professional Development:

- Attend Acceleration Roadmap implementation workshops provided by the DESE;
- Create an elementary/secondary meeting/PD calendar;
- Survey staff to determine professional development topics;
- Align professional development topics with district goals, school improvement plans and individual professional practice goals;
- Use instructional coaches to provide job embedded coaching to all K-5 teachers.

In the first three days prior to the start of school, teachers and leaders will also engage in activities that are linked to the priorities in this document and building strong connections between staff and with families. One of the activities of the first three days includes connecting teachers with their students before the official start of the school year; see [this section](#) for more information and look for updates from your child's school.

Academic Support for Any and All Students

APS is using a Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) framework to ensure equity and access to the grade-level curriculum for ALL students K-12. Within this framework, a spectrum of support exists for all students. The supports are tiered and may address the academic, social-emotional, and/or behavioral needs of learners. Typically, the three tiers are denoted as Tier I (Universal Support), Tier II (Targeted Support), and Tier III (Intensive Support). Tier I supports are outlined in detail in the previous section, [Data Informed Core Instruction and Assessment](#).

The First Six Weeks of School

During the first six weeks of school, our primary focus will be on building positive relationships with students. During this time, teachers will utilize a variety of tools to understand the academic and SEL needs of their students. As a result, teachers will be able to identify what types of support students will need to fully access tier one curriculum and instruction. When necessary, teachers will develop support plans for students; these support plans will include the type of support, duration for the support, and progress monitoring tools that will be used to evaluate student progress. Support plans, when in place, will be shared and developed in partnership with

students and families. The intensity and level of support each student receives should be fluid and should not take the place of core instruction. The different supports students receive should be consistent with their demonstrated academic needs.

Academic Supports

Throughout the year, we will monitor the students and observe for indicators that may signal a challenge or a need for additional academic or mental health support. During a typical school year, this progress is monitored through the school's Student Support Team (SST). SST is designed to be a support system for students and for classroom teachers. The goal of this work is to improve student performance by:

- Implementing additional, targeted classroom interventions
- Observing student progress/monitoring progress
- Documenting measurable results/outcomes of the interventions
- Making data-based changes to interventions.

Communication with families regarding SST varies with grade levels. Typically communication starts with teacher outreach to parent/guardian and is followed by contact from specialists or administration. Examples of the different types of support strategies teachers may use to meet student needs include, ***but are not exclusive to***, the following:

Academic Supports:

- Graphic organizers
- Breaking down directions into smaller steps
- Scaffolding assignments
- Small group/one-on-one instruction
- Explicit modeling of assignments
- Picture/Visual cues
- Extended time for submitting assignments

Social and Emotional Supports:

- Provide a "cool down"/"Break"/"Calming Space
- Provide a social story
- Cue student prior to transitions
- Provide student with a visual schedule for the day
- Provide student with frequent breaks
- Use role playing to teach appropriate behavior
- Practice transition routines

Mental Health and Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) Support for Any and All Students

As mentioned above, a trauma informed, Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) contains a spectrum of support for all students. The supports are tiered and address not only the academic, but also the social-emotional learning, and behavioral health of all learners.

Universal/Tier 1 Programming and Environmental Supports for all students this year will be robust with continued routines and procedures from previous years to allow for predictability and consistency (tenets of a trauma sensitive school) while also providing options for students who require alternatives. Some of the Universal/ Tier 1 supports are listed below.

Orientations for New and Remote Students

All Elementary and Middle Schools have developed plans for students new to Arlington Public Schools and all students who were fully remote in 2020-2021. These visits will allow students to visit their schools for a tour and to meet building leaders. Dates for these opportunities will be messaged by each of the schools and will occur in late August and early September. If families cannot attend an in-person visit, there will be virtual opportunities, as well.

At Arlington High School, all rising 9th grade High School students were able to attend an orientation at AHS in June. The high school will schedule tours on September 1st and 2nd for new students or for students who were remote last year and missed these orientations. The first AHS school days will have scheduled time to meet all teachers and hold grade-level orientation meetings. Additionally, the AHS Student Council--specifically its Freshman Welcoming, Inclusion & Diversity, School Spirit, and Communications Committees--and the Bridge Builders club will be working with administration and staff to welcome new and returning students through a variety of activities and events.

Before the Year Starts Connections for ALL Students and Families

In addition to the opportunities above, all schools are working on plans to connect with all students before the start of the school year. Building leaders will communicate the details of these opportunities to teachers and families. These opportunities will be designed to allow for any and all students and families to get oriented and to hear from their teachers before the first day of school. They may include opportunities to safely visit the school, virtual opportunities to connect, messages from teachers before the first day, or other opportunities to learn more about your child's school and teacher(s). This is a new effort for us and we appreciate families' patience as we try creative new approaches to connecting with students and families before the start of the school year.

Relationships & Community Building

We have the unique opportunity this school year to rebuild our communities and reconnect with each other. We do “back-to-school” or welcoming activities each school year and we will continue to rely on these strategies and approaches to ground our reopening following the pandemic. Another way we will build community and relationships with families and students is through the explicit teaching of Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) competencies. These competencies and skills can be taught and practiced in all content areas, embedded within lessons at all grade levels, PK-12 grade. They are also supported through the development of inclusive school and classroom climates. Additionally, Arlington uses intentional curricula to support SEL instruction.

SEL instructional supports/materials/curricula include:

- Pyramid Model Practices (Preschool)
- Responsive Classroom (Grades K-6)
- Second Step (Grades PK-5)
- RULER (7-12) and Collaborative Problem Solving (9-12)

As a continuation of last year’s focus, we will teach and practice the competencies of self-awareness and relationship skills. As we process the current pandemic and racial injustices, self-awareness is critical to identifying and processing our complex emotions, reflecting on our strengths, and understanding our identities. Self-awareness may also help students identify what they learned about themselves as learners over the past 18 months, and how to transfer those skills into their new learning environment. Relationship skills are also essential to help us build and maintain meaningful connections across race, culture, and distance as we support one another through this transition and collaboratively find solutions to new obstacles.

Some examples of how this will happen will include the continued use of approaches like the [Pyramid Model Practices](#) in our preschool, [Responsive Classroom](#) at the elementary level, the direct teaching of skills using evidence based curriculum such as [Second Step](#) and [RULER](#) in some schools, and our SEL coach directly working with the High School advisory team to help build and implement SEL advisory activities and discussions to foster community. The SEL coach will spend time in buildings to offer support to educators and teams in order to embed these practices and skills and to build stronger relationships with both students and educator teams.

The First Six Weeks of School

In the first six weeks of school you should expect your student to engage in activities that:

- Introduce students to the people of the classroom and school community, to the classroom and school environment, and to the expectations we hold about learning.

- Explicitly address how students learned in the past 18 months, build self-awareness around students' experiences learning in remote, hybrid, and in-person, and explicitly build social and emotional skills into those conversations and content-based instruction.
- Introduce and establish expectations for behavior, the limits and routines of the school day, and the ways we will apply those limits and routines.
- Introduce students to the physical environment and the materials of the classroom and the school, and teach students how to use and care for them.
- Plan time for school tours for young students and new students, and scavenger hunts and mapping exercises for older ones, to encourage them to get acquainted or reacquainted with the school environment and to feel comfortable in it.
- Establish expectations about ways we will learn together in the year ahead.

Families may access additional resources and learn more about SEL and mental health and well being on the [APS District SEL Website](#) and APS [Mental Health and Well Being](#).

Data-Informed Mental Health Interventions

Universal Mental health screeners will be administered in grades 3-12 and we are looking into screening tools that can be used with younger students. Screening tools will be administered twice (October and April). Students may receive additional support once identified and with parental consent. The screeners for the 2021-2022 school year have been identified for the different grade levels by the district screening team.

Throughout the year, we will monitor the students and observe for indicators that may signal a challenge or a need for additional mental health support. During a typical school year, this progress is monitored through the school's Student Support Team (SST). SST is designed to be a support system for students and for classroom teachers. The goal of this work is to improve student performance by:

- Implementing additional, targeted classroom interventions
- Observing student progress/monitoring progress
- Documenting measurable results/outcomes of the interventions
- Making data-informed changes to interventions.

Supports for Mental Health (Tier 2/Supplemental and Tier 3/Individualized)

Across the district, students are able to access:

- small group counseling services,
- brief therapy,
- art and play therapeutic techniques,
- skills groups, and

- short term interventions.

These are delivered in addition to their universal SEL and classroom environment, programming and instruction.

Additionally, students who require still more support are able to access brief one on one counseling, AYCC counselors, crisis support, paired skills development, short term intense skills groups, cognitive behavioral therapy skills and other therapeutic techniques at an individualized level. These are delivered in addition to their supplemental tier 2 supports and their universal SEL and classroom environment, programming and instruction.

Special Education Services

The pandemic has impacted students in various ways, academically and socially/emotionally. The beginning of the school year will focus heavily on developing classroom communities, setting clear expectations, and helping students adjust from their extended time away from school, summer and/or remote learning. Teachers will determine academic baselines for all students in the classroom through a number of the assessments and data collection tools/strategies described in greater detail in the section of this document titled, “Data-Informed Core Instruction and Assessment.” School teams will communicate with families if a concern arises during the first six-weeks of school, as we monitor all students through these reentry plans. If families are having concerns about their child’s progress, they should first reach out to the child’s classroom teacher to start a conversation. Our schools are all resourced to provide academic and SEL supports, available to all students, that reinforce the core curriculum. In the previous sections, you can find details about academic and social emotional support under “Academic Supports for Any and All Students” and “Mental Health Supports for Any and All Students.” This includes students already receiving special education services.

For students currently eligible for special education services, make sure to use the structures and team members that have always been in place to support your child - that is the classroom teacher, special education liaison, the related service providers, and the special education team chairperson. If you are not sure who your liaison is for the upcoming school year, contact the building principal. Please know these assignments may not have been made at this point in the summer. Once the school year begins, families will receive a “liaison letter” which will introduce your child’s special education liaison and the other team members. If you have not received this within two weeks from the start of school, please contact your team chairperson. You can find your team chairperson and special education coordinator [here](#) on the District website under the “Organizational Chart” link on the Special Education page. Not sure to whom or where to direct a

question? This [“Communication Ladder.”](#) also found on the Special Education page, may provide a starting point.

Covid Compensatory Services (CCS)

Discussions regarding compensatory services related to the mandatory school closures that began in March of 2020 and the subsequent shifts in delivering instruction throughout the remainder of the (19-20) and (20-21) school years occurred at either the annual team meeting or at meetings specifically scheduled to discuss CCS. If a student was found eligible for CCS, a plan was developed with families to deliver the compensatory services during the school day, outside of the school day, or through the Extended School Year (ESY) program this summer. If you have any questions, please contact your child’s team chair for more information.

EasyIEP/EdPlan Connect Updates to the Portal

We introduced a web-based portal to view and sign some of your IEP documents during the pandemic and we will continue to use this format when we return in the fall. We acknowledge this shift had some challenges. We continued to work throughout the school year with our contracted provider to improve the user experience and to address concerns and issues. There will likely be updates to the system (electronic signatures are now available for the IEP and placement page!) Tutorials and guides are linked on the Special Education [website](#) to assist with using and/or troubleshooting the on-line IEP portal. Of course, if you would rather receive a hard copy of the documents, please notify your building Team Chairperson at the start of the school year.

Evaluation and Meeting Timelines

Throughout the pandemic closures and reopening of schools, the US Department of Education required that all evaluation and meeting timelines remain in effect. Many families agreed to reasonably extend these timelines due to the health and safety factors that complicated the testing and evaluation process. However, as of the end of the 2020-2021 school year, any delayed evaluations have been completed and we anticipate reopening with no “backlog” or outstanding evaluations. If you submitted a request for an evaluation less than thirty (30) school days before the end of the year, the typical timelines apply and this testing is scheduled to be completed in the upcoming school year. The team chairperson is the point person for any questions families have about consents, timelines, or testing.

Home/Hospital Regulations

While last school year families were given the opportunity to choose remote instruction, that provision no longer exists and schools are expected to provide full-time, in-person learning for

students for school year 2021-2022. A limited and very small number of students with disabilities “might have health or medical conditions that will prevent them from returning to in-person learning during the upcoming school year.” The Department’s special education regulations provide that if, in the opinion of a student’s physician, “an eligible student is likely to remain at home, in a hospital, or in a pediatric nursing home for medical reasons and for more than 60 school days in any school year, the Administrator of Special Education shall, without undue delay, convene a Team to consider evaluation needs and, if appropriate, to amend the existing IEP or develop a new IEP suited to the student’s unique circumstances” ([603 CMR 28.04\(4\)](#)). The Department has prepared a [new physician’s affirmation form](#) that may be used by districts and schools to share with families of children with disabilities to whom this might apply to obtain the necessary information from the student’s physician. For additional information, please see Question and Answer Guide on the Implementation of Educational Services in the Home or Hospital, available at <https://www.doe.mass.edu/prs/ta/hhep-qa.html>.”

IEP Team Meetings

For many, the convenience and accessibility of remote team meetings was a welcome introduction to our practice this past school year. Remote team meetings will continue to be available this year and will be our default when scheduling meetings to start the school year. Of course, if you prefer an in-person meeting this can also be arranged, as long as health and safety conditions permit in-person gathering at the time of the meeting.

Operations for Safe and Supportive Schools

This section includes health and safety protocols that will be in place in all our schools to ensure that all students are physically safe from COVID-19. Last year, based on mitigation strategies for schools recommended by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), as well as the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) and the Department of Public Health (DPH), there was minimal spread within schools across the Commonwealth. Arlington's teachers and staff are well-versed in the health and safety protocols that we will use this year to keep all students safe. We will continue to use some of the successful mitigation strategies that we used last year which prevented in-school transmission of COVID through masking, staying home when sick, following distancing recommendations to the extent necessary, pooled testing, hand sanitization, enhanced cleaning, and now vaccinations. We are confident that the following measures will allow us to continue this positive trend.

Masking

The Arlington Public Schools will require indoor masking for all staff, students, and visitors PreK-12 to start the 2021-22 school year, regardless of vaccination status. We are beginning the year with this requirement in place for the following reasons:

1. Recent studies have shown that vaccinated individuals can both be infected by and spread the "Delta Variant."
2. We will not be implementing significant distancing or cohorting expectations in our classrooms. We will encourage teachers to set up their instruction as they did prior to the pandemic to promote interaction and socialization among students.
3. We do not yet know what the rates of vaccination are among our school students who are eligible, and we will work to acquire this information as quickly as possible at the start of the year.
4. Routine COVID-19 pooled testing is a tool for us to monitor the prevalence of COVID-19 in our schools. We will need to re-acquire consent from all staff and students at the start of the year and put systems in place to continue a successful routine testing program this year.
5. Students in Grades PreK-6 do not yet have access to COVID-19 vaccine. Furthermore, some of our students in grades 7-12 are either not able to be vaccinated or have younger siblings at home.
6. Students, staff, and visitors may have underlying health conditions or members of their household may have underlying health conditions.

Mask Recommendations and Requirements

1. Masks should comfortably and snugly fit over the nose, mouth, and chin.
2. Neck gaiters, bandanas, and masks with exhale valves are not allowed.
3. Double masking, double-layer cloth masks, or masks with additional filtration layer or filters are recommended. High filtration masks, such as KF94, KN95 are also an option for families to consider.
4. The APS expects that students will come to school wearing a mask and with multiple extra masks.
5. APS will provide masks for any students whose masks do not meet these requirements or for any students who do not bring a mask to school.

Regular Review of Masking Guidelines

Unvaccinated staff and students will be required to wear masks for the foreseeable future, and at least until vaccines are widely available to all ages. However, we recognize the need to determine metrics and conditions that may eventually allow for vaccinated staff and students to remove their masks.

Masking requirements will be reviewed periodically by the Superintendent and School Committee, in consultation with the Health and Human Services, Director and Director of Nursing, school and district leaders, and staff unions. Requirements are subject to change as we acquire more information about the prevalence and spread of COVID-19 in our schools. We will use the most up-to-date information about virus prevalence in our community and information from the CDC and MDPH to make determinations about masking requirements and other health and safety protocols.

Therefore, the parameters to be considered when reassessing masking requirements will include, ***but are not limited to:***

- Student and staff vaccination rates of at least 90% for those students and staff who are able to be vaccinated.
- Low sustained prevalence of COVID-19 in Arlington, the state of Massachusetts, and our schools, as defined by the Town of Arlington Department of Health and Human Services.
- Participation of at least 90% of students and staff across all schools in COVID-19 Routine COVID pooled testing, regardless of vaccination status.

Staff Meetings

Staff will be expected to wear masks while meeting with colleagues indoors until such time as masking guidelines are able to be lifted.

Mask Breaks

Regular breaks from masking and opportunities for outdoor instruction are now routine in our schools. We will continue to provide students with periodic breaks from masking by taking classes outdoors at teachers' discretion. Students will be provided with multiple mask breaks each day.

Mask Exemptions

In the following situations, students may be considered for a mask exemption. Exemptions must be approved by the School Principal and Superintendent, in consultation with school and district nursing staff:

- Anyone under the age of 2 years old;
- Anyone with medically-documented breathing difficulties; and/or
- Any student unable to wear a mask due to medical, emotional, and/or behavioral reasons, agreed upon on a case-by-case basis.

School Events and Visitors

We will once again welcome visitors and volunteers into the Arlington Public Schools. All volunteers and visitors during the regular school day are required to show proof of vaccination or medical contraindication. Unvaccinated volunteers and visitors will not be allowed in classrooms.

All visitors and volunteers are expected to abide by the current masking and safety policies of the district. To start the 2021-22 school year, masks will be required at all indoor events, regardless of vaccination status. If and when universal masking mandates are lifted, visitors to indoor special events that occur outside of the regular school day may also be required to either provide proof of vaccination or medical contraindication, or be required to wear a mask at all times.

The APS is exploring options for hybrid and remote opportunities for families to engage with our schools, including possibilities for remote curriculum nights and parent conferences. More information about remote accessibility for events will be shared at a later date.

Physical Distancing and Cohorts

This school year, the APS will return to instruction that engages students in collaborative conversation and problem-solving. We will not require that students remain in desks a specified distance apart and facing forward for the entire school day. Teachers may return to flexible seating arrangements and the use of rugs and collaborative materials in their classrooms.

Some cohorting measures will be in place at the PK-6 level only. Teachers will maintain seating charts and work to ensure as much distance as possible between students, regardless of the seating arrangement. Students will spend the majority of their day with a small number of their peers in “table groups,” with opportunities to collaborate and socialize for short periods of time with other peers. Teachers can rearrange seating charts as needed to ensure a productive learning environment for all students.

Students will also stay in their cohorts during lunches, distanced from other cohorts (see [Meals and Nutrition](#) for more details).

Students will be allowed to play, unmasked, with students from other classes outdoors during recess. When indoors, elementary students may meet with students from other classes during:

- Related services or specialized instruction
- Specials (such as band or choir)
- Special events or projects

When groups of students from different classes are brought together, efforts will be made to seat students with other students from their cohort and to ensure maximum distance. Additionally, outdoor instruction will be prioritized in instances where removal of masks is instructionally beneficial, including but not exclusive to speech and language services, the instruction of students learning English, early literacy instruction, choir and instrumental music, and physical education.

Illness Protocol

COVID-19 symptoms vary from person to person. Students and staff who are ill or show symptoms of COVID-19 should stay home, and parents should contact the school to report the student’s absence. Symptoms of COVID-19 include the following:

- **Fever (100.0° Fahrenheit or higher), chills, or shaking chills**
- **Difficulty breathing or shortness of breath**
- **New loss of taste or smell**
- **Muscle aches or body aches**
- Cough (not due to other known cause, such as chronic cough)
- Sore throat, when in combination with other symptoms
- Nausea, vomiting, or diarrhea when in combination with other symptoms
- Headache when in combination with other symptoms
- Fatigue, when in combination with other symptoms

- Nasal congestion or runny nose (not due to other known causes, such as allergies) when in combination with other symptoms.

Any student with these symptoms should not be sent to school and should be taken to a healthcare provider and be tested for COVID-19. Students may return to school when they have had a negative COVID-19 test AND are fever and symptom-free for 24 hours without the use of fever-reducing medication.

Quarantining, Contact Tracing, and Positive Cases

Families of students who are determined to be close contacts of a COVID-19-positive case will be directly contacted by school personnel and provided with thorough instructions.

What follows is an overview of quarantine, contact tracing, and COVID-19 response that mirrors guidance from the MDPH and DESE, [which can be found here](#). Please see the detailed guidance for more information. It is our intention to align with MDPH and DESE on quarantine, contact tracing, and positive case response, while maintaining the discretion to respond to individual scenarios with additional mitigation measures as necessary.

Test and Stay

We will implement “Test and Stay” in our schools, a program that allows for asymptomatic students who are identified as close contacts in a classroom setting to stay in school and engage in daily testing. Please see the state guidelines linked above for more information about “Test and Stay” protocols.

Quarantine

It is important to note that “Test and Stay” only applies to students identified as close contacts due to exposure in a public school setting. Close contacts based on exposure outside of the school day will receive instructions from the Department of Health and be required to Quarantine for 7 days from the date of exposure. Students may return to school after 7 days, returning to school on day 8, provided they:

- Remain asymptomatic;
- Receive a COVID test (PCR or rapid antigen) on Day 5 or later and receive a negative result; and
- Conduct active monitoring for symptoms through day 14, and self-isolate if symptoms develop.

Students who test positive for COVID-19 are required to isolate for 10 days following the positive test and may return to school after those 10 days AND are without fever for 24 hours (and without taking fever-reducing medications) AND have experienced improvement in other symptoms.

Close Contacts

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. In classroom settings where individuals are fully masked, close contacts are any individuals who have been within 3 feet of a COVID-19 positive individual for 15 minutes or more during a 24-hour period. If your child is identified as a close contact of a COVID-19 positive individual, a school or health department official will contact you as soon as possible with thorough instructions.

Information about positive cases will be posted on the district's COVID-19 dashboard, which will be updated daily with any new case counts. These data will include cases that are reported to us and cases we identify through school-based COVID-19 testing.

The Arlington Public Schools will work collaboratively with the Arlington Department of Health and Human Services and Nursing staff to evaluate each individual case of COVID-19 in our schools and will respond according to the unique circumstances of each situation. The state guidelines surrounding contact tracing, quarantine, and Test-and-Stay provide an initial starting point, but APS and the Department of Health and Human Services maintain the authority to require stricter expectations where necessary to ensure student safety.

Support Mechanisms for Absent Students

Temporary Absences for Illness

The Arlington Public Schools will ensure that no student who is sick, absent, or quarantined falls behind or is academically impacted by their required absence. We will put the following mechanisms in place to ensure the continued engagement of any students who are absent:

- Teachers will use platforms like Google Classroom to share materials with students, specific to the days they missed;
- Teachers will accept makeup work from students who are sick and ensure that students are not penalized for missed days of class;
- The Arlington Public Schools will provide 1:1 devices for all students so that they can complete remote work when necessary.

Home and Hospital Services in the Event of Medical Necessity

As we return to full-time in-person instruction for all students, please remember the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) already has regulations that provide “upon receipt of a physician's written order verifying that any student enrolled in a public school or placed by the public school in a private setting must remain at home or in a hospital on a day or

overnight basis, or any combination of both, for medical reasons and for a period of not less than fourteen school days in any school year, the principal shall arrange for provision of educational services in the home or hospital. The principal shall coordinate such services with the Administrator of Special Education for eligible students ([603 CMR 28.03\(3\)\(c\)](#)). The Department’s “[Physician Affirmation of Need for Temporary Home or Hospital Education for Medically Necessary Reasons](#)” form may be used by districts and schools to share with families to obtain the necessary information from the student’s physician. This physician affirmation of need for temporary home or hospital education for medically necessary reasons form is available here: <https://www.doe.mass.edu/prs/sa-nr/603cmr28.03-3c-form/>.

For additional information about this regulation and providing these services, please see Question and Answer Guide on the Implementation of Educational Services in the Home or Hospital, available at <https://www.doe.mass.edu/prs/ta/hhep-qa.html>.” For more information about Home and Hospital Services, see the [Home/Hospital Regulations Section](#) of this document.

Vaccinations

The APS will require the vaccination of all instructional, student-facing staff, including teachers, administrators, and teaching assistants. All unvaccinated staff will be able to submit an exemption request form and will be required to submit a weekly negative COVID-19 test. The APS will report district-wide staff vaccination rates as one of our mitigation measures, as noted in the [Regular Review of Masking Guidelines](#) section of this document.

The APS is committed to supporting both COVID-19 and flu vaccination efforts at all schools, and will continue to partner with the Arlington Department of Health and Human Services and neighboring communities to provide vaccinations for our eligible community members.

APS and the Department of Health and Human Services will coordinate COVID-19 vaccination clinics if and when our students under the age of 12 are eligible for vaccination, starting with a **COVID-19 Vaccine Clinic at Thompson Elementary School on Thursday, September 9th from 3pm-7pm.**

We encourage any unvaccinated individual over the age of 12 to call the Department of Health and Human Services at (781) 316-3170 for information about how to receive your vaccination.

Travel

We expect all families to adhere to [current state and international travel guidelines](#). Families and students who return from travel to high-risk areas are encouraged to take additional precautions, such as testing during and after travel or precautionary masking during and after travel.

Our goal is for students to safely attend school as often as possible. Mitigation measures listed here are intended as suggestions, and should not preclude students from attending school.

We strongly recommend the following actions for families who are traveling out of state or out of the country:

- Vaccinate all eligible members of your household prior to travel.
- Wear masks during and after travel.
- Test for COVID-19 before returning to school.
- Test for COVID-19 again on day 5 following travel.
- Actively monitor for symptoms of COVID-19 following travel.
- Use mitigation strategies in public areas while traveling, such as masking, regardless of the vaccination status.

If you need information about COVID-19 testing, [please visit the Department of Health and Human Services Website](#).

We will not be recommending or requiring quarantine for students following travel unless it is required by a state or national travel order.

Routine COVID-19 Pooled Testing Program

The Arlington Public Schools is proud to have participated in early pilots of COVID-19 pooled testing during the 2020-21 School Year. Our Routine COVID-19 Testing program was among the strongest in the Commonwealth, with more than 90% participation in some of our schools. The APS will continue to provide routine COVID testing for our students and staff for as long as this program remains necessary to monitor the spread and presence of COVID-19 in our schools.

Why is Participation Important even for Vaccinated Students and Staff? High participation in routine COVID-19 testing allows us to monitor the prevalence of COVID-19 in our student and staff community. It also allows us to know if “breakthrough” cases (infection of vaccinated individuals) are occurring in any schools. Finally, our ability to relax other restrictions, such as masking, relies upon our confidence in a low prevalence of COVID-19 in our schools.

We must acquire parental consent for participation in routine COVID-19 testing for the new school year. The following steps are critical to ensure the success of this program:

- **All new and returning families must set up their PowerSchool Portal Accounts.** This platform contains the Returning Student Update Forms that contain the consent for Routine Pooled Testing.

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- **All new and returning families must complete their Returning Student Update Forms NO LATER THAN SEPTEMBER 1st, 2021.** In addition to ensuring that we have the most up-to-date contact information for students, these forms include a consent form for all COVID-19 Testing in our schools. We strongly encourage all families to participate in the APS Routine COVID-19 Testing Program.

Last school year, APS required high school athletes to participate in pooled testing; **athletes will continue to be required to participate in routine COVID-19 testing** for as long as we maintain the program. Parents of athletes must complete the RSU and consent to COVID-19 Pooled Testing Participation in order for their child to participate in AHS sports.

Sanitizing and Cleaning Rooms and Materials

Numerous studies demonstrate that COVID-19 does not spread easily through contact with contaminated surfaces. However, we recognize the positive impact that routine sanitization of surfaces can have on public health and the prevention of disease. As such, the Arlington Public Schools commit to the following protocols relative to sanitization of surfaces:

- Sanitizing wipes will be available to all teachers to use at their discretion on high-touch surfaces.
- Custodians will perform routine cleaning with attention to sanitization of high-touch surfaces throughout the school day, as well as at the end of the day.
- In the event of a case of COVID-19 in a classroom, sanitizing mist will be broadly applied in classroom spaces that the infected individual occupied.

The Arlington Public Schools intends to re-introduce rugs and other soft materials into our classrooms for student use. We will also resume the use of shared materials with some limitations. For example, we will ensure that small groups of the same students share the same materials as often as possible. When shared materials are introduced, students will use hand sanitizer or wash their hands at the end of the activity or class.

Handwashing and Hand Sanitizing

Hand sanitizer will be readily available in all classrooms and common areas for student and teacher use.

Handwashing and sanitizing will be implemented upon arrival in the morning, prior to snacks and lunches, and as students return to the building from recesses or other outdoor activities. Students will be encouraged to wash or sanitize their hands frequently throughout the day.

Ventilation and Air Purification

Most student classrooms have wall univents that pull outdoor air directly into the classroom at 4-6 air exchange rates / hour. These univents are equipped with MERV-13 filters that will be changed in August, December, and April. A minimum of 4-6 air exchanges per hour is ideal to prevent the spread of COVID-19; the vast majority of our instructional and office spaces meet or exceed these criteria without additional ventilation or air purification, and those that do not have additional mitigation measures in place. .

Additionally, in all student-occupied spaces, we have also installed Austin Air purifiers to allow for additional air filtration. If at any time principals or educators have concerns about the air quality in an instructional space, we will assess the air exchange rates in that space. Windows will be open as often as possible, weather and temperature permitting.

Meals and Nutrition

We are pleased to continue to provide all students in Arlington with breakfast and lunch at no cost, and are committed to ensuring student safety during meals. DESE and MDPH have not recommended specific distancing requirements for students during lunches. However, because lunches are when students will be unmasked, we will take precautions to ensure student safety and to enable contact tracing. The following protocols will be in place to support safe meals in Arlington Public Schools:

Elementary Schools and Gibbs (PreK-6):

- Students will eat with their cohort/class/Learning Community.
- Outdoor eating will be implemented as often as possible.
- Students will be assigned seats in the cafeteria to facilitate accurate and reliable contact tracing.
- Students will sit with other students from their classes when eating indoors, with as much distance between students as is possible and feasible.
- 6' of distance will be maintained between students from different classes/Learning Communities when eating indoors.

Ottoson and Arlington High School:

- Students will have the option to eat outdoors as often as possible, weather permitting.
- Arlington High School: opportunity for open-campus lunch, with more details about the implementation of Open Campus to follow.

Transportation

Transportation will be available to students according to our usual district policies and procedures, with the following health and safety measures in place:

- All students and drivers must wear masks while on the bus.
- Windows will be open on all days when the weather conditions allow.
- Students will receive an assigned seat at the start of the year in order to facilitate contact tracing.
- High-touch areas on buses will be sanitized in between runs of separate groups of students. All buses will be sanitized at the end of each route (2x/day).

In Closing: Staying Flexible and Responsive

As we look forward to welcoming all children and youth back into our schools this year, the APS thanks you for your continued patience and support as we continue to respond to the ever-shifting status of the pandemic and the diverse needs of our students and community.

Please understand that the protocols and procedures contained in this document are subject to change throughout the school year, and that we will do everything we can to communicate changes in a clear and timely manner. In the event we need to change learning models in response to significant spread or other new developments, we will make adjustments. In the event guidance and requirements change at the local, state, or national level, we will assess our protocols and revise as necessary.

If the past 18 months have taught us anything, it is that our teachers and leaders are capable of being exceptionally flexible and responsive to changing circumstances. We commit to ensuring as much consistency and stability for the youngest members of the Arlington community as possible, while maintaining the health, safety, and happiness of our students as well.

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