

# **Norwell Public Schools**

## **Hybrid to Full In-Person Learning Transition Planning**

### **Goal**

Norwell Public School's goal is to transition all students to a full in-person learning model by fall 2021 with the hope to start that transition in the winter/spring 2021 contingent upon public health and safety recommendations.

### **Introduction**

Transitioning from hybrid learning to full in-person learning is a highly complex task. Please note that full in-person would follow DESE COVID-19 guidelines including at least 3 feet distancing. It does not mean a return to pre-COVID-19 school climates. While NPS works toward providing more in-person learning, it is important to note that COVID-19 cases are increasing. So, as we proceed, NPS will continue to monitor how the virus is affecting our community. Community case counts and spread does have a direct impact on our ability to progress toward any plan for full in-person learning. NPS will need to continue to monitor how the virus affects our ability to instruct students.

NPS has continuously monitored our ability to begin in-person learning. For this to be logistically feasible, there are many important benchmarks to clear.

### **Current Conditions at State Level**

Governor Baker's most recent statements and changes regarding the state metric system included several important recommendations and considerations. After requesting that schools move toward more in-person learning if logistically feasible, he also explained that half of the 950,000 public school students are currently doing all their learning remotely. Norwell is part of the other half that is providing in-person instruction in a hybrid setting.

Governor Baker has highlighted that he does not want districts to move to remote learning unless it is a last resort - when there is evidence of transmission in school communities. There has been concern that districts would move to full remote

learning with the return of college students combined with the Thanksgiving break. Please note that NPS has not considered such preemptive closings.

Baker suggested that “Under the new rules, schools in communities designated as grey, green, and yellow are expected to have students learning fully in-person, if feasible, and should alternate students between days of in-person and remote learning only if there is no other way to meet health and safety guidelines.”

Massachusetts Association of School Superintendents (M.A.S.S.) acknowledged that school districts want to move toward in-person learning. Below is the letter from M.A.S.S. to Governor Baker:

**MASSACHUSETTS ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOL SUPERINTENDENTS, INC.**



During the past several days, many superintendents have expressed concerns with the Governor’s press conference on Friday, November 6<sup>th</sup>, when he set expectations that schools in communities designated as grey, green or yellow return student learning fully, in person, if feasible.

Clearly, the words “if feasible” are key to any possible return of in person options.

Based on the guidance provided by the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education and the decision of the Administration to have each school district determine its return to school plan, the better part of Spring, and Summer, were spent by local districts to develop plans, negotiate agreements with local unions, and abide by the health and safety protocols.

While superintendents have been strong advocates for as much in school learning as possible, there are several realities which require the Governor’s help before many months of planning can be altered.

- 1.) Convincing evidence that less than 6' of distance is safe. We need medical experts to explicitly coalesce around safe distancing which allows for increased student capacity in classrooms.
- 2.) School bus transportation must allow for significantly larger student bus capacity. We are limited right now with bus availability and the significant costs to expand bus usage.
- 3.) Help with collective bargaining provisions since there is no way to make unilateral changes in previous agreements with local unions. Superintendents have already negotiated extensively on return to school plans.

M.A.S.S. and Superintendents across Massachusetts would welcome any statewide efforts to address these issues, that are beyond a local community’s power to impact. With that assistance and support, we look forward to the time when more in-school learning is both feasible and achievable.

Overall, the State has determined that education will be determined at the local level and must follow all prescribed safety protocols. It is important to note that the safety protocols have not changed except for metric setting for the virus spread in communities.

It is vital for families to understand that the 6 feet distancing between desks has been adopted by the vast majority of public schools throughout the state. Although guidance allowed for an absolute minimum 3 feet distancing, public schools followed the CDC guidance of 6 feet distancing in order to maintain a safe environment for students and personnel.

Some districts have been able to return individual grades to full in-person learning where classroom size and enrollment numbers have allowed them to maintain the 6 feet distancing.

For a grade level to return to full in-person learning at 6 feet distancing for full day instruction, the class size would need to be between 11-12 students per class given the size of our classrooms. NPS does not have the capacity in our school buildings to double our classrooms, nor the funding to double our staff to provide full in-person learning at 6 feet distancing.

## **Norwell Benchmarks for Full In-Person Learning**

### **Health and Safety Benchmarks - winter/spring 2021**

NPS will need to reach a consensus that moving from 6 feet to 3 feet distancing is appropriate for students and personnel. Convincing evidence must be provided by medical experts that less than 6 feet distancing is safe. NPS will need to determine the number of families with students in grades 6-12 who will attend in-person learning at distances less than 6 feet. The Education Association of Norwell, school administration, and School Committee, will need to alter the agreed upon hybrid learning model to a full in-person learning model at less than 6 feet distancing. A significant decrease in daily cases and/or a vaccine available to school personnel will help to shift a move to less than 6 feet distancing.

**Financial/Budget Benchmarks - Updates will be given at School Committee meetings with an overall progress report presented at the January 25th School Committee meeting.**

NPS has begun the process of developing an operational budget for FY'22 (2021-2022) school year. This process is traditionally a detailed, eight-month process ending at Town Meeting in May 2021. NPS works closely with the Town in the budget development and approval process.

NPS expects to have a much better understanding of our FY'21 (2020-2021 school year) budgetary benchmarks by January 1, 2021. NPS is waiting for the approval of the FY'21 Massachusetts State Budget and approval of COVID-19 Federal Grant expenses through Plymouth County. The following provides detailed information on both:

**FY'21 NPS Operational Budget (2020-2021 school year)**

- Status of the FY'21 Massachusetts State Budget (budget for current year)
  - State budget has not been approved. The budget is currently in the Massachusetts State Senate and will ideally be resolved before Winter Break
  - After the state budget is approved, the Town of Norwell will be able to assess if there are any changes to the budget set at the Town Meeting held in July 2020
- Summary of FY'21 NPS Operational Budget Reductions
  - NPS operational budget was reduced by \$700,000 at Town Meeting in July 2020
  - NPS operational budget was also reduced by an additional \$507,000 due to revenue losses in student fees, specifically:
    - Full-day kindergarten eliminated (\$412,000)
    - Preschool reduction in numbers (\$45,000)
    - Transportation reduction in ridership (\$50,000)
  - NPS operational budget was reduced in the following ways:
    - Budget cuts
      - Did not replace an assistant principal
        - 2 administrator roles are being performed by 1 person

- Cut 4 proposed kindergarten aides
- Cut proposed HS music teacher
- Cut proposed additional bus
- Retirement and long-term sub actuals
- Reductions to several supply areas
- Staff salary concessions
  - All administrators and Central Office employees are taking a 0% increase
  - Teachers are taking two furlough days
- NPS will look at restoring some of the cuts already made, if the state budget is better than forecasted in July 2020 in addition to the overall Norwell Town Budget and NPS operational budget being partially restored
- This information should be available and will be analyzed in January 2021

### **Plymouth County Federal COVID-19 Grant**

Plymouth County was given a Federal COVID-19 Grant to cover COVID-19 related expenses incurred by local municipalities. This grant currently expires on December 31, 2020.

Approximately \$900,000 has been submitted by NPS to cover COVID-19 related expenses through December 31, 2020. If the submissions are not approved, NPS will need to work with the Town to cover these expenses. If the grant is not extended and/or replenished, NPS may lose the personnel support we have received to run the schools in order to meet guidelines and regulations required by the state. This is a significant benchmark that will inform our decisions moving forward.

Details regarding NPS submitted \$900,000 request to Plymouth County COVID-19 Grant:

- 12 Covid-19 related support aides
  - Day-to-day subs are not being used
- 2 Covid-19 related support custodians plus additional overtime
- 2 part-time floating nurses
- New servers for remote learning
- Additional technology devices for learning at home
- Grades 6-12 GCVS remote learning program

- CO<sub>2</sub> sensors for every classroom to ensure appropriate air exchange rates
- All univents inspected and repaired where necessary
- All PPE and cleaning supplies
- Seamless summer Food Service staff salaries

**District Reopening Plan Logistics - Updates will be given at School Committee meetings with an overall progress report presented at the January 25th School Committee meeting.**

The next set of topics are related to the feasibility study NPS presented in the District Reopening Plan in August. The District Reopening Plan can be found on Norwell Public Schools' Website [here](#). The feasibility study can be found on page 3. Below are updates to the feasibility plan and the steps needed to be implemented once a consensus is reached on moving to less than 6 feet distancing.

NPS is currently assessing the logistical areas listed below that must be addressed if we are able to shift our hybrid learning model to a full in-person learning model. An update on these areas will be given to the School Committee at the January 25th meeting.

### **Class Sizes**

Although we targeted class sizes of 18 in our feasibility study, it is possible to meet a minimum of 3 feet with the following maximum class sizes:

- Cole - 20
- Vinal - 22
- Middle School - 22
- High School - 22
  - Most hybrid cohorts can be combined within these guidelines
  - There may be some movement of students to other teachers to balance class sizes
  - Classes that are oversized will be identified so that the balancing of classes can be addressed
  - Exploratory classes will need to be analyzed due to size and location (i.e. the loss of gymnasium space due to lunch requirements and required distancing for band and music classes)

- Kindergarten will remain in its current form of half-day academics

## Contact Tracing and Quarantining

The 6 feet distancing has enabled us to clarify potential close contacts. At 3 feet distancing close contacts could increase substantially, including the teacher. The guidance for close contacts has not changed and is defined at/within 6 feet for 15 minutes cumulatively. If we return to less than 6 feet distancing before the virus is well contained, we risk the reality of moving to full remote learning. This will happen if too many staff members are quarantining and we cannot staff the schools.

If cases continue in or outside of school, more students and staff will need to quarantine since we will no longer be in 6 feet distancing. The number of students and staff that have needed to quarantine between September 16 and November 16 for a significant amount of time this year are as follows:

School	Students	Staff
High School	153	18
Middle School	67	7
Vinal School	83	15
Cole School	50	8

During the first two months of school 20% of our faculty and aides spent time quarantined because of close contacts and/or symptoms. This rate of staff being quarantined needs to be constantly monitored and needs to decrease in a full in-person learning environment. 16% of students were also quarantined during this time because of close contacts, symptoms, and positive test results.

## Maintaining a Full Lunch Program in Each Building

- 6 feet distancing during lunch must be maintained
- With full in-person, NPS would need to utilize the cafeterias and gymnasiums for lunch in all school buildings

- Singular desk furniture for seating would need to be used. NPS is currently using classroom desks to support appropriate seating in the cafeteria, which will need to be returned to the classrooms
- A full accounting of the number of desks needed for this type of transition will need to be completed and purchases made
- The use of the gymnasiums for lunch creates logistical problems for gym classes and after-school athletics

## **Bus Transportation**

COVID-19 transportation guidelines allow for 24 students per bus.

There are currently 15 busses with three bus runs. The High School and Middle School both have 15 busses per run. The Cole and Vinal schools split the buses during the same run.

- Several possibilities to serve family's bus needs are being explored. This could result in a change to the bus contract
- There may be a need to eliminate or add a bus run
- It may be necessary for more families to drive their children to school
- All bus routes will need to be reassigned in order to bring the cohorts together. This could result in family surveys and/or a change in school buildings start and end times

While NPS is required to provide buses for grades K-6 to students living outside of 2 miles from their school, NPS will try to provide bussing to families that need bussing.

## **Students in Remote Learning**

NPS is currently required to provide a remote learning program to families that request it. This guidance has not changed. NPS will need to survey families in regards to the continuation of remote learning needs for the second half of the year. For health reasons, some families who are currently in the hybrid model may choose to change to a remote learning platform if NPS transitions to full in-person learning.

At the elementary level we are providing a fully remote model for students of NPS teachers. NPS was able to do this by moving staff around for approximately 80 students. These classes are mostly split-grade classrooms. If this number increases, NPS will need to know how many students would need to be serviced, and only then will NPS be able to determine if faculty can be moved to meet the need and maintain appropriate class sizes.

At grades 6-12 level, NPS chose to partner with the state approved Greenfield Commonwealth Virtual School (GCVS) program for NPS students requiring remote learning. It is simply not possible to create an internal remote academy for grades 6-12. Every teacher is needed in the classroom. Through GCVS, remote families can choose between synchronous learning or self-paced module learning.

At grades 6-12 level, NPS will need to identify the students who will choose fully remote for the 2nd semester. Twenty-four students are currently enrolled in GCVS at the Middle School, and 12 students enrolled at the High School.