

SCHOOL COMMITTEE STATEMENT

December 9, 2020

What factors will the School Committee consider in deciding when students can return to school fully in-person?

The School Committee and administration consult the following key stakeholders to inform their position on daily Covid-19 safety protocols and the reopening strategy:

- Hanover Public Health Nurse/Staff (daily)
- School District pediatrician (regularly)
- HPS Director of Health Services (daily)
- HPS school nursing staff (daily)
- Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (regularly)
- MA Dept. of Public Health and the State Epidemiologist (as needed)
- Parents of HPS Students via survey, public meetings, and regular feedback received via phone, e-mail, conversations, etc. (daily)
- Teacher feedback through the HTA and direct contact to SC members and administration (daily)

The School Committee and administration also review all federal (CDC), state (MA DPH and DESE), and local (Hanover BOH) guidance along with research and data released by credible sources from the public health and medical communities.

Every day, our nursing staff and Hanover public health officials arrange Covid-19 testing for our staff, students, and close contacts using the Hanover Mobile Integrated Health Unit (MIH) under the direction of the Hanover Fire Department (HFD). These results are constantly monitored, and the positive cases prompt a vigorous and thorough contact tracing process intended to identify all “close contacts” (both school-related and personal contacts) to inform quarantine procedures and to arrange additional testing as needed. This data is tracked daily on the district dashboard and is carefully reviewed to determine if any evidence of in-school spread is present that would require an adjustment to our daily routines and programming. This hands-on approach by our own medical professionals and HFD helps provide an accurate and real-time analysis of the presence of Covid-19 in our schools and the actions required to address each situation safely and promptly.

The School Committee also has a legal obligation to negotiate with the Hanover Teachers’ Association and other unions representing our employees to address the impact of decisions that change their working conditions. Moving between and among models for remote, hybrid, and in-person learning clearly alters those working conditions, and we are thus working to address these changes.

During these negotiations, we work collaboratively with our administration and public health officials to inform our decisions and planning. Taking all of this information together, we are formulating strategies to increase opportunities for in-person learning for all students as soon as possible.

What is the plan moving forward?

In the weeks ahead, the SC and the HTA will continue to meet and negotiate over key issues relating to a safe and effective return to in-person learning for all students.

Grade two is currently scheduled for return on January 4, 2021. The SC is seeking to bring more students back in person (grades 3-12) in multiple stages beginning in January once the holiday impact of local Covid-19 cases is better understood. Grade level returns would be staggered, and all students would have the opportunity for full in-person by early February. The data sources used to inform this strategy are critically important for all decision-makers, staff, parents, and students to ensure that all plans are rolled out with a common understanding of the safety measures used to move forward - or pause - throughout the implementation phase. Key considerations will be the metrics established by the MA Department of Public Health and DESE, as they are easy to understand, adaptable, and supported by the public health experts within these agencies.

Decisions about when to increase in-person learning during the Pandemic are complicated and affect thousands of people in different ways. Most importantly, these decisions must be made with the best information available to support and protect our students and staff. The academic success and social-emotional health of every student is critically important, and it is imperative that we create adaptable plans to get as many students on-site with their teachers and peers as soon as possible. Our hybrid model was meant to serve as a bridge that allows for careful monitoring of cohorts and to buy us time to prepare for the next steps. We are now seeking to apply what we have learned about Covid-19 in our schools and how it affects staff and students to inform our choices about safety measures and learning objectives. Now that we have three months of experience and local and national data that indicates low instances of in-school Covid-19 transmission in schools, we anticipate moving forward with plans for increasing in-person learning. We will keep you informed as these plans evolve using all of our normal communication platforms.