

“Schools and early care and education (ECE) programs are an important part of the infrastructure of communities as they provide safe, supportive learning environments for students and children and enable parents and caregivers to be at work. Schools and ECE programs like Head Start also provide critical services that help to mitigate health disparities, such as school lunch programs, and social, physical, behavioral, and mental health services.”

From CDC Operational Guidance for K-12 Schools

(<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/k-12-childcare-guidance.html>)

“With current high levels of vaccination and high levels of population immunity from both vaccination and infections, the risk of medically significant disease, hospitalization, and death from COVID-19 is greatly reduced for most people. At the same time, we know that [some people and communities](#), such as our oldest citizens, people who are immunocompromised, and people with disabilities, are at higher risk for serious illness and face challenging decisions navigating a world with COVID-19...Health officials and individuals should consider current information about COVID-19 hospitalizations in the community, as well as the potential for strain on the local health system and COVID-19 cases in the community, when making decisions about community prevention strategies and individual behaviors. Communities and individuals should also make decisions based on whether they are at high risk for severe disease and take into account inequities in access to prevention strategies.”

From CDC Community Levels

(<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/science/community-levels.html>)

RSU 26 will continue to prioritize a positive, engaged school experience in compliance with US CDC guidelines on preventative measures and comply with state CDC guidance on responses to identified cases as our main guidance on school operations.

Social & Academic Support

Students continue to have significant social, emotional and academic needs as a result of COVID. The district remains committed to providing increased levels of support and to monitoring and meeting changing needs.

Although the schools will continue to remain prepared to switch to hybrid or remote if the circumstances demand it, including technology readiness, this will not be a primary focus of planning for Academic Year 2022-2023. At a minimum, instructional staff should update Google Classroom/SeeSaw at least weekly.

Safety Measures

The following safety measures will be in place for Fall 2022:

1. **Vaccinations** - The district continues to encourage vaccination as a highly effective means of reducing risk and will continue to provide vaccination clinics.
2. **Testing** - state provided pooled testing was terminated in May 2022 in favor of the medically more beneficial use of rapid home tests when symptoms arise. The school will continue to support state programs to share home tests and help in obtaining tests when families need support.
3. **Ventilation** - the schools will continue the robust ventilation program already in place ensuring that classrooms have many air changes per hour of preferably fresh outside air or, when cold temperatures require it, MERV 13 filtered air. HEPA air filters will remain in classrooms and use of open windows and outdoor class time as weather allows is encouraged.
4. **Hygiene** - students and staff are expected to continue to use frequent handwashing/hand sanitizer and mouth/nose covering during coughs and sneezes. High availability of hand sanitizer will continue.
5. **Stay home when sick and when feeling symptoms** - students and staff continue to be expected to stay home when COVID-like symptoms appear unless at home testing indicates return is safe. If any doubt remains, wearing a mask while symptoms continue is strongly encouraged.
6. **Cleaning protocols** - a focus on cleaning shared surfaces once a day will continue by RSU26 custodial services.
7. **Positive case protocols** - the schools will continue to follow US CDC guidance on quarantining and isolation (<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/your-health/quarantine-isolation.html>). (At the present time these include quarantining/isolating for 5 days if you test positive for COVID. All sick individuals and close exposures should wear masks when not in isolation until 10 days out from onset of symptoms or exposure.) The schools will also continue to follow state protocols on infectious disease reporting, tracking, and responding to outbreaks (<https://www.maine.gov/doe/schools/safeschools/healthed/nurseresources/manual/communicable>). This includes that individuals should report COVID cases to their school & the school nurse.
The district will shift from direct notification of classroom cases to a district dashboard reporting grade level cases.
8. **Masks** - high quality masks (e.g. KN94 or N95) provide a good level of protection to the individual wearing them. The district will continue to support mask wearing by individuals who wish to do so. We will continue to communicate clear expectations that all people who choose to wear masks will be supported in their choice. High quality masks will be available to staff and can be provided to students who need them. CDC guidance leaves setting mask requirements to local communities based on local conditions with an emphasis on acute cases (i.e. hospitalization) rather than number of cases. Unfortunately acute cases are tracked at a 4-county level for our area, causing us to

focus on more local metrics. Thus the present policy of masks being optional will remain in place until one of the following occurs:

- a. There are strong signs of in-school spread. This could include case levels in the schools (or a part of a school) that are noticeably higher than an appropriate (i.e. equal levels of testing) comparison to the community levels. This will also depend on school nurse assessment of new cases and their likely sources
- b. There are new virus variants that present increased risk of serious health consequences
- c. CDC guidance changes

Special events

Broadly all special activities will return more closely to normal, but parent and community participation in the schools and participation in higher risk activities like indoor sports and singing will continue to be handled on a case-by-case basis by school administrators based on CDC guidance. High community levels of spread, large events, and high risk activities may continue to lead to more limitations on specific activities and events than described above for general student school participation.