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Dear Ashland Parents and Caregivers:

The 2021-2022 school year will officially open to students on Monday, August 30. We very much look forward to the return of students, faculty, and staff. While many of us had hoped to begin the year with few, if any, restrictions, the Covid Delta variant has wreaked havoc on our plans. In order to keep our students, faculty, and staff safe the year will begin with ALL students, faculty, and staff required to wear masks when inside our school buildings. We hope by instituting a masking policy and other mitigating measures our students, faculty, and staff will be able to return to full in-person learning for the entire school year. The Ashland School Committee and I are committed to keeping everyone safe and we will continue to revisit this policy each month.

Please find below a number of areas that address the mitigation steps we will take to ensure that we provide as safe an environment as possible for all students, faculty and staff, and by extension, their families and caregivers. Each principal will share specific protocols as it pertains to their building.

As more relevant information is obtained this document will be updated so please routinely review the document. All new information will be highlighted in Blue so it is easily accessible.

As always, should you have any questions please feel free to contact me or your child(ren)'s principal. Again, I look forward to welcoming the students, faculty and staff of Ashland to school next week.

Be well,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jim Adams', written in a cursive style.

Jim Adams, Superintendent of Schools

## 2021-2022 Reopening Protocols

### I. Learning Environment - Full In-Person

The Ashland Public Schools will participate in full-time, in-person learning beginning on August 30, 2021 per the Department of Education's requirements outlined in the [May 27, 2021 Memo](#). In summary the memo stated: **“Fall 2021 school reopening: For the fall, all districts and schools will be required to be in-person, full-time, five days a week, and all DESE health and safety requirements will be lifted. This includes all physical distancing requirements.”** The Department of Education also removed remote and hybrid schooling as options for school districts. Thus, these learning environments are not legally permissible and would not count toward Massachusetts General Law on Student Learning Time.

The school district will follow its usual approach in supporting students who must miss school for a significant, extended period of time (more than 14 days) due to a serious illness. Families who choose not to send their child to in-person public school in Ashland, must either homeschool their child, enroll their child in an approved Commonwealth Virtual School, or enroll them in an approved private school.

### II. Mitigation Strategies

#### A. Mask Wearing

Per School Committee Policy and recommendation from the Massachusetts Department of Education on August 20, 2021 all students in grades Pk-12 are expected to wear masks inside schools regardless of vaccination status. The Ashland School Committee will review local and state data each month to determine if the mask mandate will be lifted for specific buildings or populations.

[Ashland Policy EBCFA Face Covering](#)

[Massachusetts Department of Education Mask Mandate Request](#)

## **B. Ventilation**

Last year the District took several steps to increase ventilation and improve air quality in our buildings and classrooms. Our practices reflect recommendations from [Schools for Health: Risk Reduction Strategies for Reopening Schools](#). These recommendations include installing air filters in unit ventilators with an appropriate MERV rating, using air purifiers with HEPA filters in every classroom, and offering faculty and students opportunities to learn and be outdoors when possible. The District once again conducted a comprehensive inspection, cleaning, disinfecting, and repair of all systems this summer. We feel as though our buildings are in excellent condition from a ventilation standpoint.

## **C. Physical Distancing and Lunch Room Set-Up**

On May 27, 2021 the Department of Education lifted all physical distancing requirements in schools. While there is still continued debate on how much physical distancing is required to assist in the mitigation of Covid-19, the District will continue to strive for maximum distancing between students, faculty, and staff when feasible. When using other mitigation measures, such as mask wearing, hygiene emphasis, encouragement of vaccinations, and staying home when not feeling well, it is clear that the distance between students especially at the elementary level can be less than 6 feet of distance.

Due to limited space in our buildings and in order to conduct all of our academic activities, lunch rooms will see students in Grades PreK-8 distanced between 3-6 feet, however the high school will not have a physical limit placed and students will be encouraged to eat outdoors and in designated areas where distancing can be accommodated.

## **D. Vaccination and Covid Testing**

The District encourages all students, faculty, and staff to get the COVID vaccine when eligible. The vaccine has shown to be a powerful tool in reducing health risks to individuals. The chart below shows how the District is doing with regard to our vaccination status. This is one metric we will continue to monitor in order to lift our masking policy.

The District will participate in the State offered Diagnostic Testing program [DESE/DPH Diagnostic Testing Program](#). Should the District determine that this process is not

stringent enough we will consider reinstating COVID Pool Testing. Families will be asked to provide consent to the District so testing can occur.

***It is critically important that if your child is experiencing ANY Covid symptoms that they stay home and get tested and not return to school until a negative test result is received and are symptom free.***

### **E. Cleaning and Disinfecting**

We will continue to follow our cleaning practices from the 2020-2021 school year including:

- Ensuring high touch areas (i.e. door handles, railings) are wiped down multiple times throughout the day with disinfectant.
- Disinfectant wipes will be located in conference rooms and office areas for use.
- Where feasible doors will be kept open to limit touching.

### **F. Hygiene**

[Handwashing](#) removes pathogens from the surface of the hands. While handwashing with soap and water is the best option, alcohol-based hand sanitizer may be utilized when hand washing is not available. Students and staff are required to exercise hand hygiene upon arrival at school, before eating, following bathroom use, after removing a soiled mask and prior to donning a new mask, and before dismissal. When handwashing, individuals should use soap and water to wash all surfaces of their hands for at least 20 seconds, wait for visible lather, rinse thoroughly, and dry with an individual disposable towel.

[Hand sanitizing](#) is required if handwashing is not feasible. Hand sanitizer should contain at least 60 percent ethanol or at least 70 percent isopropyl content.

## **G. Other Building Areas**

### Drinking Fountains

Students will be asked to bring their own full water bottle to school each day. Drinking fountains that require contact for use will be closed. Students may use motion activated drinking fountains when filling water bottles if a refill is needed during the school day. Bringing a full water bottle from home will decrease the number of trips from the classroom, and reduce hallway congestion.

### Student Lockers

Students will be allowed access to lockers at this time.

### Sinks, Hand-Sanitizing Stations, and Touchless Trash Cans

All schools have multiple sinks for handwashing and hand-sanitizing stations. Every teacher will have a supply of hand sanitizer in their room. All classrooms and common areas have touchless trash cans.

### Use of Outdoor Tents

Faculty and staff are encouraged to utilize outdoor learning environments including installed tents when appropriate.

## **III. Transportation**

All students, faculty, and staff, regardless of age and vaccination status must wear a face covering when on a school bus or van designated for school transportation purposes. Additionally, the windows on a school bus shall remain open a minimum of 2 inches during use.

## **IV. Quarantine and Contact Tracing Protocols**

The district will follow the state requirements for quarantining of individuals who test positive or who are deemed to be a close contact of a positive individual, as described in detail at <https://www.doe.mass.edu/covid19/on-desktop/protocols/protocols.pdf>.

This includes the following guidelines:

- An individual who is diagnosed with COVID-19 must quarantine for 10 days from the onset of symptoms (or positive test if asymptomatic). They may return to school after 10 days without a fever and other symptoms have sufficiently resolved
- 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.

The following close contacts are exempt from testing and quarantine response protocols:

- Individuals who are fully vaccinated and asymptomatic
- Classroom close contacts where both individuals were masked and at least three feet apart
- Bus close contacts where all individuals are masked and windows open
- Individuals who have had COVID-19 in the past 90 days and are asymptomatic
- Close contacts who are asymptomatic but not vaccinated may continue to attend school if they participate in the “Test and Stay” protocol, where individuals are tested daily for seven days from date of exposure using a rapid antigen test at school, and may stay at school if they test negative.
- Close contacts who are asymptomatic but not vaccinated and who do not participate in “Test and Stay” will need to remain home on quarantine for at least seven days (returning on the eighth day if they have a negative COVID test and no symptoms; if no test, returning on the eleventh day if no symptoms).
- Any individual who is symptomatic, whether vaccinated or not, and who is not a close contact must remain out of school while they have symptoms, but may return if they receive a negative COVID test, is given an alternative diagnosis by a health professional, have improvement of symptoms, and is fever-free for 24 Hours

[\*\*A Parents’ Guide to Decision Making During a Pandemic \(Flowchart\)\*\*](#)

**V. Athletics and Extracurricular Activities (Field Trips)**

Outdoor athletics will have zero restrictions according to Ashland's Face Covering Policy. Athletic and indoor activities will require all participants and spectators to have a face covering.

Student field trips will be reinstated upon approval and as long as all District COVID protocols are followed.

**VI. 504 and IEP Meetings**

All IEP and 504 meetings will be held remotely for the 2021-2022 school year unless an in-person meeting is requested by a family.

**VII. Visitors and Volunteers**

In order to ensure the safety of all students, staff, and faculty, volunteers will not be permitted for the start of the school year. We acknowledge and understand the value of school based volunteers, therefore, we will continue to monitor school, district, and statewide data, in order to update visitation protocols.

Visitors to buildings to meet with principals, teachers, directors, or other school personnel must wear a face covering.