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# Whitman-Hanson Regional School District



Superintendent

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## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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# Whitman-Hanson Regional School District Shares State Guidelines for Reopening Schools in the Fall

## District-Specific Plans to be Released Later This Summer

WHITMAN -- Whitman-Hanson Regional School District Superintendent Jeffrey Szymaniak wishes to share the initial state guidelines from Gov. Charlie Baker and the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) for the 2020-21 academic year, which will be modified as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

While prioritizing health and safety as well as getting as many students back in school as possible, districts across the state will now begin to develop three different plans:

one for learning entirely in-person, one for a hybrid model that includes in-person and remote learning in the event in-person learning is not feasible due to budgetary limitations and/or health concerns and one for remote learning only should there be a second spike in COVID-19 cases regionally.

These plans will be created by a task force of district officials, teachers, staff, students and parents and submitted to DESE in the coming weeks. The final plan for the district will be announced in August.

"As we begin to plan and develop our three different models for reopening our schools in the fall, the district will prioritize the health of our students, staff and community members," Superintendent Szymaniak said. "Each approach will be created with the best interests of our students and staff in mind while adhering to Department of Elementary and Secondary Education guidelines. Once we are able, we will share further details about these plans. We once again would like to thank everyone for being understanding and patient during this process. We look forward to our next school year with you all."

Guidelines that must be part of these plans include:

- Setting up cafeterias, gyms, libraries and other large spaces to promote the greatest amount of social distancing possible.
- Requiring students from second grade on, and all adults, to wear a face mask, face covering or face shield while learning in-person and while riding on the school bus. These should be provided by the student/family, but the district will have a limited amount of disposable masks to provide students who need them.
- Providing other preventative measures for students and staff, such as hand washing stations and hand sanitizer, and cleaning frequently touched surfaces.
- Having school nurses wear extra protection, such as face shields and goggles, when directly treating students. A room should also be designated to isolate those at the school who are suspected of having COVID-19.
- Determining class size based on how many students can be taught with social distancing in place, with desks anywhere from three to six feet away from each other.
- Strongly recommending that students, teachers and staff get their regular flu vaccine in order to prevent any disruption to learning.

- Surveying families throughout the summer and possibly the school year to help with decisions such as which children will return to school in-person, technology needs of students learning remotely, and who will need bus transportation in order to get to school

At this time, screening procedures to enter school buildings, such as taking a person's temperature, will not be required. COVID-19 testing also will not be required for students to return to school.

Additional guidelines, including those for busing, will be released in July.

The initial guidelines, [which can be read in full here](#), are also subject to change depending on how the situation surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic progresses. The guidelines were developed by DESE's Return-to-School Working Group, along with experts from the fields of infectious diseases and public health.

Approximately \$200 million from the Commonwealth's federal Coronavirus Relief Fund is available to help with the costs of reopening public schools. Schools are eligible to receive up to \$225 per student for eligible costs incurred due to the COVID-19 public health emergency, such as training for school staff, supplemental social and academic services, reconfiguration of school spaces, leasing of temporary facilities and acquisition of health and hygiene supplies.

Other potential funding sources to support school reopening include \$502 million from the Coronavirus Relief Fund that had previously been allocated by Gov. Baker to cities and towns, as well as \$194 million in federal Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund grants.

In partnership with legislative leadership, the state has also committed \$25 million in federal funds for a matching grant program to help school districts and charter schools close technology gaps that have inhibited remote learning for students and families who lack access to computers or internet connections.

Specific state funding for each district will be determined at a later date.

The statewide closure of school buildings began in mid-March and was extended through the remainder of the 2019-20 academic year as an unprecedented step in limiting the potential spread of COVID-19 and continuing the practice of social

distancing as more positive cases and deaths are announced in the state each day.

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