

October 27, 2021

District Update

Hi Folks,

Today our students and staff completed their 38th day of school for the 2021-2022 school year. Across all grades we have seen wonderful examples of students regaining the energy and benefits of experiencing in-person, full-time learning in our classrooms. While things are certainly not back to “normal” as we all had hoped, everyone is working hard to support our students to do their best and reach their maximum potential.

Thanks to our Town of Dedham DPW, Facilities Department, and Eversource utility crews who are working hard tonight to get Oakdale Elementary School back up with full power in time for school tomorrow after today’s last-minute cancellation due to a fallen tree limb into power lines on the property early this morning.

Please take a brief moment to read through the district updates listed below.

COVID SAFETY UPDATES

Student Vaccines: We were happy to see that yesterday, the FDA voted to support the use of the Pfizer COVID vaccine for children ages 5 – 11. While it still is pending full FDA and CDC approval, we are actively working with the Dedham Board of Health and our school nurses to identify ways we can best collaborate and help get as many of our students access to the vaccine as quickly as possible when the vaccine is ultimately fully approved (hopefully soon!).

Student/ Staff Vaccination Rates: For our eligible students, ages 12+, we continue to encourage families to get students vaccinated. Currently the Dedham High School student population stands at about 65% vaccinated. We are proud to report that 92% of the DPS staff has been fully vaccinated. Overall, the school (staff + students) is about 70% vaccinated.

Masking Update: Yesterday, DESE revised their mandatory masking mandate for MA public schools through January 15th. The opportunity still exists for schools who can show 80% vaccination rates (staff+students) to apply for exemption from this mandate. However, as noted above, we are still below the threshold of 80% at DHS. Additionally, it is important to note that if we meet this 80% mark and secure the DESE waiver, allowing vaccinated students and staff to remove masks will still be pending Dedham School Committee approval.

Test & Stay Program: We have fully launched the COVID Test & Stay program district-wide this month. The program allows for students who have been identified as a school-based “close contact” to test each morning before school, and if negative, remain in the classroom. You can learn more about this program at our DPS COVID Test & Stay webpage.

Dedham Covid Rates: The most recent [COVID-19 data for Dedham](#) shows that cases peaked during the week of September 16 in the town and overall demonstrates an up and down pattern of positive case rates in town. Based on my conversations with Dedham Health Director Kylee Sullivan, this trend is expected to continue as we approach the winter months. Below you will find some information about the trends in schools and data about our ongoing testing programs (pooled surveillance testing and “Test & Stay” for close contacts):

- a. [COVID cases in MA schools](#) (For comprehensive statewide results, click [HERE](#))
- b. [Positive Cases in DPS Schools](#)
- c. [DPS Pooled Testing Participation and Results](#)

STUDENT SOCIAL EMOTIONAL SAFETY

Dedham Public Schools continue to work towards maintaining a safe, welcoming school environment for all our students. I wanted to call particular attention to several key events happening that support this focus:

MetroWest Adolescent Health Survey: Dedham High and Dedham Middle School students will once again be participating in this important, voluntary and completely anonymous survey this month. Every two years, the MWAHS survey, conducted by the [EDC](#), identifies detailed data about youth behaviors in the areas of substance use, violence, bullying, mental health, sexual behavior, and physical activity in 26 Massachusetts communities. This is the third time since 2016 that the Dedham Public Schools will administer the survey to its students in grades 6-12. You can learn more about the survey, as well as [find important resource information here](#).

Boston Children’s Hospital Anxiety Resource: Anxiety is one of the most common behavioral health disorders among children and adolescents in the United States. To support families with managing anxiety in their children and adolescents, Boston Children’s Hospital Neighborhood Partnerships (BCHNP) developed a documentary in 2021: [Managing Anxiety: Information for Parents and Caregivers](#).

The Dedham Public Schools has a robust PreK-12 counseling team to support your child’s learning and social-emotional development in school and/or connect you to community-based supports. [Please find the contact information for the DPS counseling team linked here](#).

Safe Schools Training: Next week, our DHS staff will be participating in Safe Schools Training. The Safe Schools Program for LGBTQ Students is a joint program of the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) and the Massachusetts Commission on LGBTQ Youth . It was founded in 1993 to address concerns of bullying and suicide risk that faced LGBTQ youth in Massachusetts public schools.

DPS CURRICULUM ADVISORY

We are looking for interested volunteers who would like to be part of the District Curriculum Advisory (DCA), which serves as a representative group of faculty, parents/caregivers, and

interested community members who would like to help interface with community groups and offer insight to the Office of Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment on issues relating to PK-12 curriculum. This is a 1-year position. The DCA will meet monthly for an hour in the evenings. If you are interested in participating as a member of the District Curriculum Advisory please [complete this brief form](#).

DHS GUEST SPEAKER

On Thursday, October 14, the World Language, Library and English departments welcomed author and guest speaker, Jennifer De Leon. She spoke with a large group of World Language students about the importance of recognizing Hispanic Heritage Month and the many influences Latinos and Hispanics have had on our country. She also hosted a breakout group with our students of color and allies to discuss diversity and identity, and then held a create writing workshop for students looking to further their writing skills. We are grateful for the Dedham Education Foundation's generous sponsorship of this event, and we thank the DEF and Nancy Bradley Foundation for their support.

OTHER ITEMS OF NOTE:

Supply Chain Challenges: We continue to face significant challenges with receiving food supplies from our food services vendors. It is important to note that there will likely continue to be challenges with obtaining menu items and this will create possible last-minute changes to items on the typical menu calendar. We appreciate your patience and understanding.

Oakdale Elementary School MA School Building Authority (MSBA) Rebuilding Process:

On Monday, 10-18-21 the Finance and Warrant committee voted unanimously to support Article 9 in this fall's Town Meeting warrant. This article requests funds ("Not to exceed \$1,000,000") for a feasibility study to move to the next stage of the MSBA process, in which Oakdale Elementary is eligible. This is all part of our process to continue improving our school facilities, in particular our Elementary School Buildings that are aging. Fall Town Meeting takes place on Monday, November 15. [Learn more about this process here.](#)

Student Contact Information Forms: If you have not yet turned in your Student Contact Information Forms, please do so as soon as possible. If you need another form to review, please reach out to your school office. This is particularly critical for DMS and DHS students, where we are still missing almost 50% of returned forms.

Important Upcoming Dates:

Tuesday, November 2: No School For Students – Educator Professional Development

Saturday, November 6: Dedham School Committee – Virtual Office Hours via Zoom *link will be posted on DPS website

Thursday, November 11: No School –Veterans Day Observed

Wednesday, November 24: Half-Day For Students - Thanksgiving Break Begins

Thank you for your continued support of the Dedham Public Schools!

All my best,

Mike Welch
Superintendent