



# Southbridge Public Schools

---

132 Torrey Road, Southbridge MA 01550

Telephone: (508) 764-5450

July 14, 2020

Dear Families,

I hope you are enjoying some well-deserved rest as the summer begins. This past school year we faced challenging and unexpected circumstances with building closures due to the COVID-19 pandemic. We know that this was difficult for students and families. We also know that Southbridge families are resilient and determined, and that our teachers and staff are dedicated to helping our students to succeed. Our recent work to build a strong foundation for Southbridge Public Schools will certainly help us as we go forward.

As you may be aware, the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) has released initial guidance on how schools should plan for different conditions that could develop over the summer. As a result, the district is developing plans for three possible scenarios: a full return to school buildings, distance learning, and a combined model of the two.

You can expect regular updates about our contingency plans and about the outcome of reopening discussions during July and then an increase in communications in August. You can find updates that we release on our website, on our official social media pages, and through email or phone calls. I know that uncertainty is difficult to manage, especially after so many months of disruption due to Covid-19. That is why we are committed to keeping you informed as early as possible about school in the fall.

Of course, these decisions are also influenced by factors such as Board of Health guidelines, State guidelines, and how data on Covid-19 develops in the next two months. As we formalize contingency plans for in-person, distance, and combined models of instruction, our focus is on the health and safety of the learning community, including students, teachers, and staff.

Additionally, I would like to remind you of the following announcements about summer meals and summer reading.

## **Summer Meals**

This summer, we are pleased to continue our community meals program without interruption. During the school closure, we provided meals to Southbridge children weekdays from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. at Eastford Road School, Charlton Street School, West Street School, and Brookside Terrace. For the summer, we will continue to serve meals on this schedule at these locations. You can pick up breakfast and lunch at these sites regardless of which school your student(s) will be attending in the fall.

## **Summer Reading**

Summer Reading lists have been released for each elementary grade level, for middle school students, and for high school students. Paper packets with these lists and related learning activities are available at all of the meal sites. You can also find links to the summer reading lists on [our website](#).

We hope that these summer reading lists and suggested activities will help to provide you with some enjoyable learning time during the summer. The summer reading list is a great way to continue reading with your child and to support their learning in the next few months.

Many of the books can be found at Jacob Edwards Library in Southbridge. You can call the library at (508) 764-5427. The library is still helping people get books during all phases of closure due to COVID-19, so you can talk to a librarian at any time during business hours. You can also search Google or another search engine for electronic access or to find ways to get the books on the list.

## **Aspen Family Portal and Report Cards**

We are pleased to announce that you now have access to the Aspen Family Portal, which is an online system that allows you to access report cards and other important information. You should have received an email that provides you with information about how to log into the Aspen Family Portal. If you did not receive this email, please contact [FamilyPortal@SouthbridgePublic.org](mailto:FamilyPortal@SouthbridgePublic.org) or call your school's family liaison with any questions. Information about the Aspen Family Portal is also available on our website and social media. If you need to update your email or other contact information, you can also call your school's family liaison or send an email to [FamilyPortal@Southbridgepublic.org](mailto:FamilyPortal@Southbridgepublic.org).

## **Communication During the Summer Break**

As a reminder, you can find information as it becomes available on our website, on our official social media accounts, and through other communication channels such as email and phone calls. If you would like to update your contact information, or confirm that we have the correct email address and phone number for your family, you can write to [help@southbridgepublic.org](mailto:help@southbridgepublic.org) or [ayuda@southbridgepublic.org](mailto:ayuda@southbridgepublic.org). You can also call or text (774) 601-0082 with updates to your contact information.

We are committed to providing students in Southbridge with rich opportunities for learning under any circumstance. Thank you for your patience and hard work during this unusual time.

Please have a safe and enjoyable summer.

Regards,

Jeffrey A. Villar, Ph.D.  
Receiver/Superintendent  
Southbridge Public Schools

## **A Summary of the Massachusetts Commissioner of Education's Initial Guidance On The Reopening of Schools For the 2020-2021 School Year**

*Please note:* The following is a summary of the initial fall school reopening guidance that was released on June 25, 2020 by Commissioner Jeffrey Riley. These guidelines could be updated further in the upcoming weeks and months.

Additionally, you can expect regular updates about reopening this summer, with an increase in communications in August. You can find updates that we release on our website, on our official social media pages, and through email or phone calls. You can also send questions to [help@southbridgepublic.org](mailto:help@southbridgepublic.org) or [ayuda@southbridgepublic.org](mailto:ayuda@southbridgepublic.org)

**Goal:** To safely bring back as many students as possible to in-person school settings, maximize learning and address the holistic needs of students.

- Medical Community (consulting with Commissioner) supports the return to school, based on research data (based on medical information in mid-June 2020)
- Requires a combination of health and safety strategies
- Plan for a level service - plus budget i.e supplemental funds to cover our current budget, from state budget
- Plan for a level service-plus budget i.e. supplemental funds to our current budget, from state budget \$202 million for COVID related reopening costs

School systems have to plan for 3 scenarios:

1. Full return to school
2. Fully remote learning
3. Hybrid model of in-school and remote

Protocols will be issued if a student or staff tests positive for COVID-19. School systems will have to have a remote learning program for students who are unable to return to in-person school.

### **Medical Evidence Suggests:**

- Schools have not played a significant role in COVID-19 transmissions

- Rates of COVID-19 infections are lower for children than adults
- If exposed, children may be less likely to become infected with COVID-19
- If infected, children may be less likely to infect others with COVID-19

### **Health & Safety Guidance**

- Students in grade 2 and above are required to wear a mask/face covering that covers their nose and mouth (students in kindergarten and first grade should be encouraged to wear a mask). Transparent masks may also be used.
- Adults (all staff) are required to wear a mask/face covering that covers their nose and mouth (unless a medical condition makes it impossible to wear a mask or face covering)
- Mask breaks should occur throughout the day where students can be 6 feet apart or are outside. Masks/face coverings should be provided by the student/family, but extra disposable masks should be made available by the school for students. Reusable masks provided by families should be washed at home daily.

### **Physical Distancing**

- A minimum physical distance of 3 feet has been established with 6 feet of distancing being encouraged where feasible.
- Desks should be facing in the same direction with a minimum distancing of 3 feet, (6 feet where feasible).
- Schools should consider using the cafeteria, library, and auditorium for additional classroom needs. Face shields and goggles must be worn by school nurses and staff supporting students with disabilities in close proximity when distancing is not possible.

### **Student Groups**

- Elementary schools should aim to keep students in the same group throughout the day.
- Middle and high schools are encouraged to minimize mixing student groups to the extent that is feasible.
- Cohorts - Schools should divide students into small groups that remain with each other throughout the day. Inter-group contact should be minimized

- Capacity - There are no required maximums or cohort group sizes as long as schools adhere to physical distancing requirements.

### **Screening Upon Entry**

- Checking for symptoms each morning by families and caregivers is critical and will serve as the primary screening mechanism.
- Schools should provide information to families on daily screening.
- Screening procedures are not required at the point of entry to the schools.
- Temperature checks are not recommended.

### **Hand Hygiene - Handwashing and Hand Sanitizing**

- Students and staff are required to exercise hand hygiene (hand washing or sanitizing) upon arrival to school, before eating, before putting on and taking off masks, and before dismissal.
- Handwashing should be done for at least 20 seconds, with visible lather and individual disposable hand towels.
- If washing is not feasible, hand sanitizing with at least 60% ethanol or at least 70% isopropyl content can be used. Hand sanitizer dispensers should be placed throughout the school.

### **COVID-19 Related Isolation Space**

- Schools are required to designate a COVID-19 related isolation space ("Caring Room") that is separate from the nurse's office or other space where routine medical care is provided. This is for a child who may be ill and need to return home.
- In-school COVID-19 testing is not recommended (at this time).

### **Vaccines**

School systems should work with parents to ensure that students are current on all standard vaccinations before they return to school.

### **Health & Safety PPE Supplies**

Schools should have an inventory of standard healthcare supplies (masks and gloves). Teachers do not need to wear gloves while teaching but may need to wear gloves while performing certain tasks in assisting students.

## **School District Possible Reopening Plans**

All districts must have a plan for the following:

1. In-person learning with new safety requirements
2. Hybrid learning: combination of in-person and remote learning
3. Remote learning

Across all 3 models, school systems need a plan for how special populations, including students with disabilities, and English learners will receive necessary services and accommodations.

## **Plan Development and Submission**

School systems will be required to submit their comprehensive plans for all three models in August. The plans must meet all health and safety guidelines mandated by DESE. School systems should first prioritize developing an in-person learning model with the DESE mandated safety requirements.

## **In-person Learning with New Safety Requirements**

- Students will return to school with the customary 5-day week.
- School systems should consider using alternative spaces for instruction (library, cafeteria, auditorium) to meet distancing requirements.
- Community spaces outside the school may have to be considered to allow appropriate distancing for all students. Specialist teachers who possess appropriate licensure may be enlisted to serve as core teachers to reduce class sizes.
- Students should remain with their cohort to the greatest extent possible.

## **Hybrid Learning Models**

- When planning for a hybrid learning model, DESE recommends that school use an A/B cohort model that isolates two distinct cohorts of students who attend school in-person on either different weeks, different days of the week, or half day each day.
- High risk students should be prioritized for full-time, in-person learning where

feasible.

- Students who do not have internet and/or computer access at home should come to school.

### **Point Person or Teams**

- Name a COVID-19 Response Leader for each school and for the district.
- Establish Planning and Implementation Teams at the district and school levels.
- Student Support, Special Education, English Learners, personnel & Staffing.
- Facilities, Operations, and Transportation.

### **Communication Plans & Structure**

- Communicate during the summer with students, families, staff and community.
- Work closely with the local board of health.
- Conduct a family survey on the return to school.

### **Planning for Training**

Build time in the fall calendar for training sessions.