



NEWMARKET

School District

SAU #31 Safe School Opening Plan 2021 - 22

June 22, 2021, Updated August 24, 2021

Presented by the Safe School Opening Taskforce:

Parents: *Carla Romano*
Karl Searl
Jen Wieselquist

Town Officials: *Steve Fournier, Town Manager*
Aimee Gigandet, Newmarket Recreation Department

Staff: *Amanda Brauer, Teacher*
Erin Burns, Teacher
Jen Farnese, Nurse
Meg Fiore, Teacher

Administrators: *Dr. Susan Givens, Superintendent of Schools*
Debra Black, Assistant Superintendent of Schools
Erica MacNeil, Director of Student Services

School Board

Representative: *Andrew Haemker, School Board Representative*

Approved by the School Board June 22, 2021, updates approved on August 5, 2021

Introduction

Several weeks ago, the Commissioner of Education informed all School Districts that they must publish a safe school opening plan for the upcoming school year by June 23, 2021, to access federal grant money. Fortunately, SAU31 has been planning for next year's opening since the fall and offered on-campus learning for most of the current school year. Most of what will be shared in this plan has already been communicated at meetings and in documents on our website. That said, circumstances, guidance, and attitudes can change quickly, and we want to make sure that our plan provides the most current information available and is flexible enough to guide the change process in the upcoming school year.

The Newmarket School District will continue to prioritize the health and safety of students, educators, and other school and district staff, based on guidance provided by the CDC, NH DPHS, and current local and state COVID recommendations. Protocols will be reviewed and updated periodically based on recommendations from public health professionals throughout the school year.

As a result of decreased transmission rates of COVID-19, the availability of vaccines to all staff and students 12 and over, and feedback from students, staff, and parents, the Newmarket School District plans to open schools with full in-person learning in August 2021 with fewer restrictions, while following [NH DPHS Universal Best Practices](#) and guidance.



This document will address the following primary considerations:

- 1. Public Input and Plan Review:** How did the Newmarket School District seek public input and take such input into account in determining the plan? How will the Newmarket School District update its Safe Return School Plan during the year?
- 2. Health and Safety:** How will the Newmarket School District maintain the health and safety of students, educators, and other district staff?
- 3. Continuity of Services:** How will general school operations (arrival, dismissal, recess, meals, etc.) be similar or different next year? How will the Newmarket School District provide continuity of services for students' academic, social, emotional, mental, and other health needs? How will the Newmarket School District provide continuity of services for staff social, emotional, mental, and other health needs?

1. Public Input and Plan Review

Stakeholder Input

In June 2021, the Newmarket Superintendent of Schools established the Safe School Opening Taskforce, which was charged with reviewing current practices and safety recommendations and gathering stakeholder input to inform the development of the Safe School Reopening Plan. The Taskforce included parents, faculty, and administrators.

Stakeholder Surveys: The taskforce surveyed staff, parents, and students in early June to learn more how the availability of vaccinations have influenced their level of comfort with rolling back some more controversial mitigation strategies such as social distancing and mask wearing. When developing the safety recommendations, decisions were made based on approximately 80% consensus of all stakeholder groups. The survey results are incorporated into the various sections of the document.

Survey #1 Responses:

	Responses
Staff	159
Students	183
Parents	444

Survey #2 (Pre-K through Grade 6) Responses:

	Responses
Staff	99
Parents	319

Town Hall Style Meetings with Staff and Parents: Town Hall style meetings were held with staff (June 17th) and parents (June 21st) prior to submitting the recommendation to the School Board for consideration. Information from these meetings were used to further clarify stakeholder concerns and helped shape the development of the plan.

Plan Revisions

This plan will be updated periodically when additional information is made available and the administration has the opportunity to consider the impact the changes have on school operations and discuss the changes with union leadership, staff, parents, the School Board, and students. The following represent the conditions for increasing or reducing protocols.

Conditions for Reduced Restrictions

- Revised guidance by the CDC/ NH DHHS

Conditions for Increased Restrictions

- Inability to staff schools as a result of COVID cases, OR
- Revised guidance by the CDC/ NH DHHS

To aid in decision making, NH DHHS recommends that schools use community transmission and vaccination data to guide decisions around when to increase safety protocols and/or relax them. This aligns with our school opening plan.

On August 11th, NH DHHS offered the following guidance: If there are high levels of community transmission, universal masking indoors is recommended unless there is a high level of vaccinations in the community. Here is how they define these terms.

Substantial (High) Transmission: A region has a Substantial level of community transmission if either new cases over the last 14 days per 100,000 in population is greater than 100 or the test positivity rate over the last 7 days is greater than 10%.

High Vaccination Levels: High levels of vaccination is achieved when at least 80% of a population is fully vaccinated. Even higher levels of vaccination may be necessary to break transmission from the Delta variant, but at least 80% fully vaccinated will offer high levels of protection to the community.

Based on this guidance and these definitions, the following *framework for protocol changes* (mask requirements) will be used this year:

- If transmission is high in the Seacoast region or Newmarket for two consecutive updates, universal mask wearing indoors is required.
- If transmission rates are low or moderate in Newmarket but moderate in the Seacoast region for 14 consecutive days or if transmission is low in Newmarket and in the Seacoast region, or if the community vaccination rates reach 80% then indoor mask wearing is optional.

The data used for making decisions would be directly from the New Hampshire COVID-19 Response Dashboard Map located at covid19.nh.gov/dashboard/map which is accessible to all stakeholders. A demonstration on where to find this information on this site will be provided at the meeting.

To help understand how the framework would inform mask wearing protocol decision making, the example below uses data from the website as of August 20, 2021.

Example - August 20, 2021

The dashboard data for the Seacoast Region and Newmarket state:

Seacoast Region- New cases over the last 14 days: 273 per 100,000, Positivity rate over the past 7 days: 5.8%

Newmarket (population 9,445)- New cases over the last 14 days: 22 or math equivalent 220 per 100,000, PCR test positivity rate over the past 7 days: 8.4%

Substantial (High) Transmission = 100 new cases over the last 14 days/100,000 population

OR

10% Positivity rate over the past 7 days

Vaccination Status in Newmarket:

Fully Vaccinated: 55.3%

At Least 1 Shot: 59.9%

Ages 12-19 47.8%

Ages 20-29 39.4%

Ages 30-39 61.4%

Ages 40-49 83.3%

Ages 50-59 61.8%

Ages 60-69 90.6%

Ages 70-79 82%

Ages 80+ 52.3%

School Staff: 88% (As of June 30, 2021)

High Vaccination Levels = High levels of vaccination is achieved when at least 80% of a population is fully vaccinated.

Results Based on the Framework and Data:

The Seacoast Region and Newmarket are both categorized as having substantial transmission based on new cases over the last 14 days being greater than 100/100,000 (273, 220) and the vaccination status in Newmarket (55.3%) is below the 80% Vaccination level needed for the population in town to be categorized as high enough to offer high levels of protection to the community.

Mask Requirement:

Universal Mask Wearing Indoors

2. Health and Safety

In addition to surveying stakeholders, the Taskforce reviewed preliminary recommendations for the fall published by the [NH Department of Health Services](#) and current [CDC guidance for schools](#). CDC recommendations for the fall are anticipated in late June or early July. Many of the protocols the district is currently following remain recommendations for the upcoming year including disinfecting and sanitizing, ventilation, contact tracing, screening *and testing*, and hand washing. Several safety protocols such as wearing masks, social distancing, use of plexiglass, and cohorting have been modified. Based on the information reviewed, the following protocols are recommended for the upcoming school year.

Mask Wearing: On Thursday, June 17th, the NH DPPS modified their recommendation for indoor mask wearing in schools and daycares. They now “suggest you can safely choose to remove face mask requirements indoors regardless of a person’s vaccination status” in school settings. When asked about comfort level with optional mask wearing next year, regardless of vaccination status, stakeholders responded as follows.

Are you comfortable with optional mask wearing outside when socially distanced?

	Yes	No
Staff	96%	4%
Students	89%	11%
Parents	95%	5%

Survey 2 (Grades PreK-6), are you comfortable with optional mask wearing inside next year?

	Yes	No
Staff	88%	12%
Parents	86%	14%

Survey 1, Once vaccines are available to all students in a school building, are you comfortable modifying /eliminating social distancing requirements and making mask wearing optional inside?

	Yes	No
Staff	85%	15%
JSHS Students*	79%	21%
Parents	79%	21%

- Based on survey results and guidance from the NH Department of Health and Human Services, mask wearing will be optional indoors and outdoors next year. If community transmission (Newmarket and Seacoast region) is high and vaccination rates are below 80% in Newmarket, then universal mask wearing indoors is required.
- Staff will not monitor or enforce parental mask wearing preferences unless mask wearing is medically necessary and documented by a physician.

- As part of our SEL supports for next year, Guidance Counselors will provide information to staff about how to support students who wish to wear masks in school.

Physical Distancing: The District will continue to social distance to the greatest extent possible, with a goal of providing at least 3 ft, and average class sizes of approximately 20 students, with fewer in the lower grades. In addition, students will eat in lunch in cafeteria except 6th grade in assigned seats sitting approximately 3 feet apart. Classroom furniture and materials will continue to be kept at a minimum in classrooms to maximize physical distancing.

Contact Tracing: The state continues to require schools to contact trace in the upcoming year. To do this, we must account for who is in our facilities, where they are during the school day, and how long they are within 6 feet of another person for 10 minutes or more. Protocols that enable contract tracing include: cohorting, not congregating in groups before and after school, limiting access to the facility to staff, students, and contractors/vendors essential to operating the school, documenting attendance at all school events, and signing in and out of the building. The same protocols in place at the close of school this year will be followed next year, except that cohorting will be by grade level PreK-8, as opposed to by classroom, we will not use plexiglass barriers, and students and staff will be allowed to leave and return for appointments and urgent matters (procedures to be developed).

Vaccinations: This spring vaccines were made available to staff and students 12 years of age or older. To expedite the vaccination process for staff, students, and other community members, we volunteered to offer community vaccination clinics at our JSHS. To date, with the help and support of the fire department and regional health network, we have run four community vaccination clinics. We will continue to operate clinics based on community interest and provide vaccinations for students under 12 when they are recommended and if the state continues to allow community clinics. Here is what we know about staff and student vaccination status currently.

✓ **Staff:**

- 68% of staff were vaccinated at our clinic
- 20% of staff reported that they were previously vaccinated
- 12% of staff vaccination status is unknown
- We do not have verification of vaccination for those who did not participate in our clinic
- We will not have verification of vaccination for any new staff hired

✓ **Students:**

- 25% of students at the secondary level participated in our vaccine clinic
- We have no verification of vaccinations for 75% of eligible students
- No elementary students are vaccinated

Unfortunately, we have no mechanism for verifying vaccinations. If we have verification of

vaccinations, we can expedite contact tracing because those vaccinated do not need to quarantine if they are a close contact of someone who tests positive for the virus. For this reason, we surveyed staff and parents to see if they would be comfortable sharing a copy of their vaccination card and to learn more about parent preferences for vaccinating their children. Here is their response.

Would you feel comfortable providing the nurse with a copy of your vaccination card for contact tracing purposes?

	Staff	Parents
Yes	82%	62%
No	18%	6%
Not Vaccinating Children	NA	14%
Undecided about Vaccinating Children	NA	18%

To help expedite contact tracing and the notification process, we encourage staff and parents to provide the school nurse with a copy of vaccination cards.

Diagnostic Screening and Testing: The district will not provide any diagnostic screening or testing; however, we will continue to ask students and staff to conduct morning wellness screening at home and if not feeling well for any reason, stay home.

Coordination with State and Local Health Officials: The superintendent, assistant superintendent, and nurses when applicable, will continue to participate in calls provided by the NH Commissioner of Education, the NH Department of Health and Human Services, the State Superintendent Association, and all other relevant parties.

Sanitizing, Ventilation, and Hygiene: The protocols the district is currently following for disinfecting and sanitizing, ventilation, and hand washing remain recommendations for the upcoming year.



3. Continuity of Services

Next year, we are excited to welcome all students back to school on campus, five days per week, with no remote option. This section will provide information on general school operations as well as our plan to support the academic, social, and emotional needs of students and staff.

A. General School Operations

Arrival and Dismissal: Arrival and dismissal will continue to follow the same process in place at the conclusion of the FY21 school year. Students will enter and exit through multiple doors and proceed directly into their classroom/homeroom. Current, anticipated, school start and end times for students are as follows.

Elementary Arrival:

Parent Drop-off: 8:20 - 8:40AM

Bus Drop-off: 8:40 – 8:45AM

Dismissal:

Parent Pick-up: 2:50 – 3:10PM

Bus Pick-up: 3:10PM

Secondary Arrival: 8:00-8:15am

Dismissal: Parent Pick-up 2:40pm

Times may be adjusted based on the bus schedules.

Lunch Routines: All students will eat lunch in cafeterias except for grade 6, with assigned seating that observe 3 ft. social distancing.

Recess: Given the low rates of transmission, students will have full access to playgrounds and equipment (protocols will be developed when guidance is updated by CDC).

Athletics: Protocols for sports will align with NH Athletic Association recommendations.

School Buses: Mask wearing on school buses is required until requirements for public transportation change to allow optional masking

B. Academic Needs

The Newmarket School District will continue to utilize multiple data points and assessment tools to assess and monitor academic progress, learning loss, and system interventions.

Assessments: Assessments include, but are not limited to the NH SAS, NWEA, PSAT, SAT, program assessments, local assessments, and various diagnostic tools at all levels. Data teams will meet to review student data for Multi-tiered Intervention and system improvements.

Mathematics:

- Current data have indicated that the greatest learning loss has occurred in mathematics. The district has purchased core math programs for grades PK-8, Algebra 1, Algebra 2, and Geometry.
- Staff will receive extensive training in math instruction during the 2021-22, 22-23, and 23-24 school years.
- Student progress will be monitored PK-10 utilizing the assessments identified, including program assessments
- Administrators will monitor math program implementation

ELA:

- Early literacy screening tools have been added to the NWEA suite of assessments.
- Students will be monitored, and interventions provided as needed.
- Grant funds will be deployed to support instructional improvement and intervention as needed.

Addressing Learning Loss:

- The district has reallocated funds to support a summer learning loss and credit recovery program for students in grades K-12. The program is comprehensive and will support all academic areas of need. Both transportation and food services will be available. Summer programs will be offered in 2021-22 as well
- We have expanded the utilization of NWEA/ MAP testing from grades 3-5, to grades PK-10, to include MAP Reading Fluency and progress monitoring
- The district is adding several online, adaptive, learning platforms to support personalized learning for students
- Title 1A funds have been reallocated to support students at the secondary level, in addition to the elementary school

Accommodations for Students with Disabilities: All students with disabilities will participate in full in-person instruction, 5-days per week. In that event that a student has a documented health condition, the Director of Student Services will work with the student and family to design an appropriate learning plan.



C. Student Social, Emotional, Mental, and Other Health Needs, including Health and Food Services

The taskforce surveyed parents and students to learn more about the impact the pandemic has had on their well-being. Here is their response.

How do you feel you (student) or your child/ren (parent) has been impacted by COVID protocols this year?

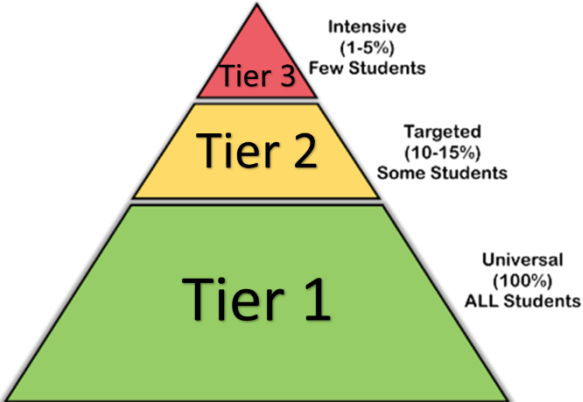
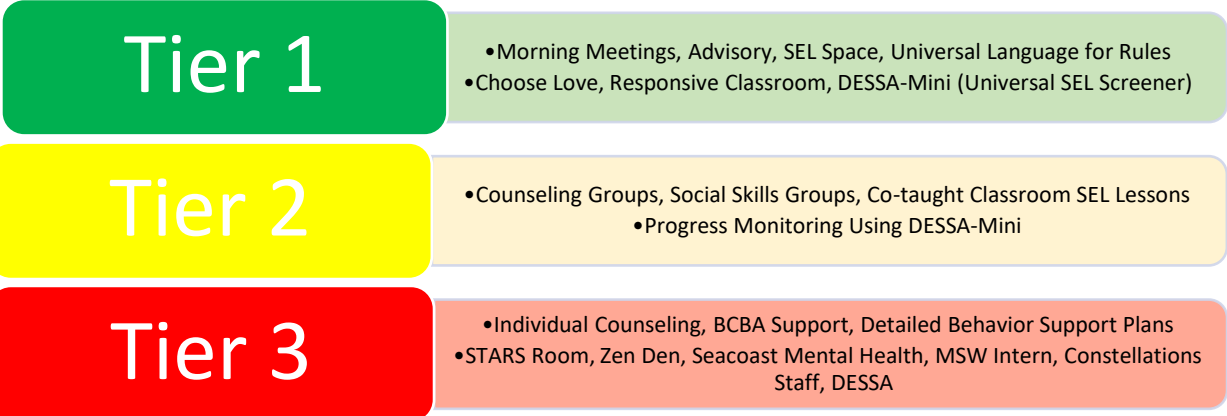
	Students	Parents
Greatly	25%	26%
Somewhat	41%	44%
Adapted/Not Impacted	34%	30%

The health and well-being of students, families, and staff are at the forefront of our minds as we begin to transition away from the pandemic. The pandemic has impacted everyone socially and emotionally. To support students upon their return, we will provide the following Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS).

Why MTSS?



Our Social Emotional multi-tiered learning plan includes blocks of time within the school day to focus on developing skills to help students process the experience we have just had and develop the skills to manage emotions, express empathy for others, connect with and develop positive relationships with others, and understand the ripple effect of decisions they make. Tier one activities are woven into the fabric of the school day and are designed to support the mental, social, and emotional wellness for all students. Students that need additional support to help them succeed will engage in Tier 2 and/ or Tier 3 activities.



Lunch is available to all students eighteen and under at no cost, and this will continue during summer programming through the Southern New Hampshire Services program and include breakfast. The district will continue to make efforts to identify students faced with food insecurity.

D. Staff Social, Emotional, Mental, and Other Health Needs

The district has engaged Dr. Lynn Lyons to work with staff in August, to promote a clearer understanding of the ways in which stress and anxiety impact students, and to

help staff develop strategies necessary when supporting students and mitigating stress and anxiety as much as possible.

A comprehensive SEL program has been established that includes regular mindfulness activities for staff. Several books have been provided to staff related to stress and mindfulness. In addition, many staff have comprehensive healthcare coverage provided by the school district, with access to mental health and counseling services.

The superintendent engages with staff weekly, through meetings and town halls. She has worked closely with the unions to understand and address any and all issues as they arise.

The district will continue to expand services to staff as needed and provide reasonable supports.

Summary

A great deal was learned as the Newmarket School District navigated the changing landscape of the COVID Pandemic. The primary goal has been and remains, mitigating illness, ensuring the safety of students, staff, and members of the community, and maximizing learning opportunities for students. To that end, we will continue to follow CDC guidelines with consideration to local data, trends, and NH DHHS recommendations.

