



Reimagining Education During the Pandemic

**PORTLAND
PUBLIC SCHOOLS**



PPS Update: Vaccinations, Expanding In-Person Opportunities and Plans for Hybrid Instruction

January 26, 2021

Dear PPS Families and Staff,

We promised to provide you an extensive update before the end of the second quarter. Following a number of developments, including those involving state mandates and Oregon's vaccine rollout, we are eager to share with you what our plans are for the coming weeks.

In short, we will **begin the third quarter of the school year (Q3) by continuing Comprehensive Distance Learning, while expanding in-person opportunities for some students**, starting with programming at 19 school sites initially and hopefully expanding to all schools by March. We are also accelerating our plans to partially reopen a number of schools to **hybrid learning by early April, for our youngest learners** (with students alternating during the week between in-person and distance learning).

This message includes sections on:

- Current public health metrics and guidelines
- Health and safety measures at PPS
- Vaccination plan for educators and school staff
- Expanding on-site opportunities, including limited in-person instruction, athletics and performing arts
- Maintaining continuity of learning
- Supports for students and families
- Learning recovery plans



Health Advisory Panel, Oregon Health Authority Recommendations, Current Metrics

As has been the case throughout the pandemic, we remain in continual contact and collaboration with multiple public health and governmental agencies, including Governor Brown's office, the Oregon Health Authority, Oregon Department of Education, Multnomah County and OHSU, along with our district's [Health Advisory Panel](#).

COVID-19 has impacted our community in a number of ways, and we are not yet done with this pandemic. Recent data shared with our Board of Education show that COVID case numbers remain high in Multnomah County, and it is as important as ever for all of us to follow good public health practices such as wearing masks, washing hands and keeping socially distant.

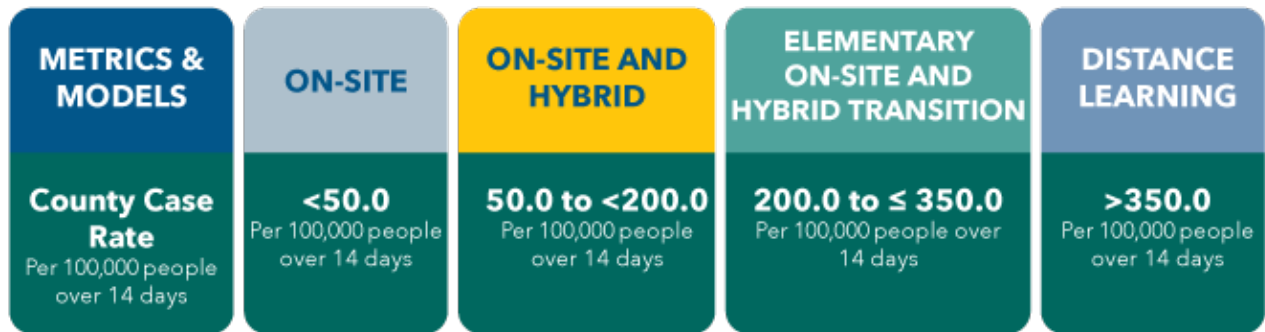
Since last March, our decisions have been informed by science, made in accordance with public health guidance and restrictions, and centered in racial equity and social justice. Our highest priority is protecting the health and safety of our students and staff while maintaining a continuity of learning.

As has been the case throughout the pandemic, we remain committed to opening schools once it is safe and feasible to do so. Two recent changes at the state level now allow us to accelerate our reopening plans.



Updated ODE Guidelines

First, the Oregon Department of Education updated its [Ready Schools, Safe Learners](#) guidance on January 19. In this most recent update, the Oregon Department of Education adjusted the public COVID-case thresholds, based on the framework from the Harvard Global Health Institute. The county metrics continue to serve “as the best tool for determining when cases are down enough to return to in-person instruction.” (ODE update)



We are pleased that the adjustments will allow for an immediate expansion of in-person activities at our schools. Specifically, the raising of the COVID-case threshold for mandatory distance learning to 350 or more cases over a two-week period coupled with the downward trend in cases in Multnomah County allows us to move forward. As of January 16, the two-week county case rate was 293.6.

An additional note: we are watching closely, alongside public health experts, the new COVID-19 variants that are now showing up in the U.S. Those variants could affect any or all of our planning for spring.



Health & Safety Measures

Safety continues to remain at the center of the state’s guidance. While the COVID-case thresholds were adjusted, the remaining safety requirements and protocols within *Ready Schools, Safe Learners* remain mandatory. There is a lengthy list of requirements we are prepared to implement, these include:

- Entry screening at the entrance of every school
- Contact tracing sign-in for COVID protocol
- Facemasks (except for medical need/disability) for all students and adults

- Isolation spaces for symptomatic individuals
- Social distancing: 35-square feet per person to allow for physical distancing
- Establishing stable cohorts or groupings of students in order to:
 - Minimize the number of cohorts with which a student interacts
 - Ensure that students do not interact with more than 100 people in a week, including deliberate scheduling, grouping and more restricted movement on campuses
- More rigorous cleaning protocols, including hand sanitizer availability
- Improved air-quality measures (including upgraded HVAC filters and air purifiers in spaces without good ventilation)
- Reinforcement of recommended public health and good hygiene practices, and reinforcement via messaging, posters and signage



Vaccination Plan for School Staff

Second, and very importantly, COVID-19 vaccines are now being distributed in Oregon. We said in the fall that one important aspect of re-opening classrooms was access to vaccines for educators and school staff. Governor Brown has decided to [prioritize this access](#) for educators, given the critical importance of opening schools safely.

Portland-area health care systems are now collaborating with school districts, including PPS, to provide vaccinations to educators, school staff and our community-based partners who work with students and families. **Vaccinations start this week.** Depending on the quantity of vaccine doses made available to health providers in Oregon, it will take at least four weeks before all educators and staff have the opportunity to receive *both* rounds of the vaccines, which is fully effective two weeks *after* the second dose.

For staff and families who have general questions about COVID-19 vaccines, we put together a special [vaccines webpage](#) that includes a number of resources. We will also be co-hosting a virtual **Vaccination Panel Conversation** with Multnomah County and the Coalition of Communities of Color on Friday, January 29, from 5:00 - 6:30 p.m. You can watch the conversation by tuning into our [PPS YouTube channel](#).



Expanding On-Site Opportunities for Students to Return to School

As we permit for the student-facing staff to have the opportunity to receive both doses of vaccine, observe the health metric trends that guide our re-opening, and continue to work with our labor partners to come to agreement on how we will proceed with safely returning to school, **we are pleased to announce the start, and ongoing rollout and expansion, of limited in-person instruction (LIPI).** We will introduce and open LIPI across schools in three phases. You can find information, including the participating schools and start dates, in this phased schedule [here](#).

Our **LIPI Phase 1 begins this week** at Madison High School. We are rolling out on-site programming by prioritizing student populations with the highest needs. We will continue to phase in schools as required individual campus plans are approved, to ensure all required ODE safety guidelines are observed, and as we test protocols and arrange for transportation and other student supports. We are grateful to the

educators and other staff who have volunteered to participate in this in-person offering and are working to accelerate our rollout as quickly as we can safely do so.

If you are not familiar with this term “LIPI”, it is an on-campus model supported by the Oregon Department of Education and designed to meet the needs of **specific groups** of students based on needed educational, relational, social-emotional, curricular, instructional, and/or assessment supports. Staffing, including by educators, is on a voluntary basis. Here are a few other LIPI facts:

- LIPI cohorts will consist of no more than 20 students;
- Participating students are limited to two cohorts per week per site;
- All students and educators must observe mask, physical distancing requirements and follow our safety operating procedures;
- Each LIPI session will run for about two hours.

Safety is central to all LIPI planning. Schools must complete a detailed safety and reopening plan that we must submit to the Oregon Department of Education for approval. This plan includes building and classroom site plans, staff and family engagement protocols, staff training outlines, mandatory walkthroughs following guidelines from OHA and the Centers for Disease Control, custodial plan and much more. As each school has its individual plan approved, additional schools will begin offering limited on-site programming also. LIPI represents the latest on-campus programming added at PPS schools this school year.

In addition to new on-site limited instruction opportunities, PPS continues to offer athletics training, which has been welcomed by our student athletes. **Expansion of athletics**, including a possible return to (modified) full practices and, eventually, team competition, is contingent upon the [consolidated guidance](#) of the Oregon Health Authority and Oregon School Activities Association (OSAA). The following **modified athletic seasons** have been identified by the OSAA, but are dependent on health metrics permitting these activities:

- OSAA Season 2: February 22 to April 10 for the following sports: football*, volleyball, soccer, and cross country
- OSAA Season 3: April 5- May 22 for baseball, softball, track & field, tennis and golf.
- OSAA Season 4: May 10- June 26 for basketball*, swimming, and wrestling*

*Full contact sports, like football, are currently prohibited by OHA.

Our thanks to the students, coaches, athletic directors and other staff who have followed the guidelines and safety practices that have allowed for some much-needed team activity and training.

In addition to athletic activities, the district’s Visual and Performing Arts (VAPA) team will begin offering **outdoor opportunities for high school choir and band members**, also beginning in the month of February. We are excited to start hearing the sounds of our student musicians at our high schools.

We are eager to welcome students to our new LIPI programs, both for the specific benefits these opportunities afford students and as next steps toward **introducing hybrid instruction** in our schools. The health and safety practices and protocols used for LIPI programming, like those related to athletics training and performing arts activities, will carry through as more students and staff return to our school buildings.



Additional Notes on Health & Safety Planning

Understanding the importance of deliberate and enhanced health and safety practices and protocols, our teams have worked for months to make school buildings safe for students and staff. Our facilities, maintenance, custodial and other teams have spent countless hours adjusting and adapting our physical spaces in anticipation of welcoming students back to our hallways and classrooms.

The PPS Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) include guidelines and protocols covering entry screening, busing, cleaning and disinfecting schools, contact tracing, physical distancing, personal protective equipment (PPE), restroom use, ventilation and much more. You are invited to visit our [SOP home page](#), which is updated regularly, for more information.

Students and staff entering schools will notice a number of new things including:

- Special signage and floor markings to ensure social distancing
- Hand sanitizer stations
- Special sign-in and sign-out protocols
- Plexiglass and other physical barriers
- Reduced number of desks in classrooms to maintain social distancing (required by the State of Oregon to be 35-square feet)
- Dedicated space for students or staff who show to be symptomatic during the day
- Regular cleaning of often-used surfaces

As part of optimizing our buildings' HVAC (heating, ventilation, and air conditioning) systems, we reviewed a number of technologies to improve airflow and added things like portable air filters when needed. While we continue to look for ways to further improve HVAC performance, **all PPS school buildings meet current public health air quality standards** set by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and Centers for Disease Control, Oregon's Occupational Health and Safety Association, and Multnomah County.

KGW-TV recently toured Harriet Tubman Middle School with our Chief of Schools, Dr. Shawn Bird. You can watch the tour by [clicking here](#) to see a visual example of how school buildings are being prepared to welcome back students. And you can expect to see a number of new, district-produced illustrations and videos over the next few weeks, as we open more schools and classrooms.

We will soon share more detailed information that explains things like what our physical classroom environments will look like and updated school bus riding procedures that we will be observing during this pandemic. In the meantime, our teams continue to do outstanding work to allow us to open our buildings safely for students and staff.



Planning Underway for a Hybrid Model of Instruction

All of these health and safety measures are important to our ability to eventually re-open schools to a

hybrid model instruction, where **students alternate during the week between in-person and distance learning**. Our goal is to offer hybrid instruction during the third quarter, beginning with a number of elementary schools in March. We will prioritize our youngest learners, who are most developmentally in need of in-person instruction. We hope to eventually offer hybrid instruction at all elementary and middle schools.

Comprehensive Distance Learning (CDL) will remain an option for students whose families prefer that their students remain on-line, full-time for the duration of this school year. **Within a week, we will be making available an online registration form for families of elementary and middle school students to gauge the level of interest in students participating in either remote or hybrid models of instruction.** Please look for an email from us in the coming days. We will also reach out to families through direct communication from schools and through our culturally specific community partners. It is important that we know your preferences for hybrid or distance learning, so that we can plan for staffing and transportation accordingly.

High school schedules and the state requirement that students may not interact with more than 100 other students at school make offering hybrid learning to high school students much more complicated; but we are working on several scenarios that would include at least some level of on-campus learning for high school students. We intend to share more details of a proposed model as we work through some of the constraints involved with implementing a hybrid model at the high school level.



Maintaining a Continuity of Learning and Connection via Comprehensive Distance Learning

As we work toward additional opportunities for in-person instruction, Comprehensive Distance Learning continues for all of our students. We are proud of our teachers, administrators and support staff for providing a multitude of virtual learning experiences for their students and finding creative ways to keep students engaged during this unprecedented time.

Something that was made clear last spring after launching CDL was the critical importance of students feeling connected to their teachers and their school community for success in online learning. To cultivate a sense of community, elementary schools are implementing morning meetings, middle grades are engaging in advisories or social emotional learning (SEL) connections, and our high schools shifted to four courses each semester to allow students to make greater connections with their teachers. Across all grade levels PPS has integrated SEL into our instructional model. We regularly provide opportunities for students of all ages to share their feelings and concerns. Resilience lessons, as well as other social emotional learning curriculum, morning check-ins, and circle times have provided students with specific ways in which they can communicate their feelings and concerns during this pandemic.

We know that distance learning lacks some typical aspects of in-person learning. To support students and educators across the district, core content areas were honed to focus on the most critical work in each grade, and central office content teams are supporting educators with daily lesson materials optimized for online delivery. Those same teams are doing regular feedback loops with educators and making course adjustments as we proceed through the school year.

To ensure that online learning is well rounded, **Visual & Performing Arts** and **Physical Education** are still part of our students' experience. These content areas are focused on bringing joy, movement, and creativity to each day.

This pandemic necessitated a historic **shift to digital learning platforms** and the use of technology tools to deliver instruction. Besides providing computer laptops or devices to every student in the district who needed one, we began the school year by providing our educators with professional development on learning the tools and resources available to gain confidence and support with the skills necessary for the effective delivery of distance learning.

In the fall, dashboards were created for our schools and our school support teams to monitor and facilitate student engagement. Throughout the fall and winter, 88-90+% of our students in grades 6-8 engaged with the Canvas learning platform on a weekly basis.

And, at the conclusion of the first quarter, student grades in our comprehensive high schools were largely consistent with past performance.

As we approach the third quarter, there will be two additional opportunities for us to gauge **students' progress** and experiences in Comprehensive Distance Learning. At the start of February, we will offer a **remote administration of the MAP assessments in Reading and Mathematics** for our students in grades 3-8. This is a voluntary opportunity for our students and parents that will allow us to learn about students' growth and achievement during Comprehensive Distance Learning, and will help us plan for learning recovery opportunities. The MAP assessment is an opportunity to better understand and plan for students' learning needs. The data will only be used for planning purposes and will not be used for evaluative purposes. Finally, MAP assessments are important to our planning for the second semester, and our Learning Recovery Plan, in math and language arts and whether we should focus on broader areas of the curriculum or revisit critical content in new ways. The administration of MAP assessments is structured to have minimal impact on instructional time and is designed to account for the fact that students are working in very diverse learning environments at home.

In addition, the **Successful Schools Survey** will launch in the second week of February. As in the past, this survey will provide families, students and staff an opportunity to provide feedback on their school connections, trusting relationships and a sense of belonging during this school year.



Supports for Students and Families

We understand, and hear frequently from parents, that this pandemic has been difficult for many of our students. Our students' social emotional and mental health is always a primary concern for us. No matter whether in CDL or in-person learning, we continue to offer many types of support to students and families. These include **Social Emotional Learning (SEL), counseling and mental health supports**, academic supports, access to basic needs, [computers and internet access, and meals](#).

Our schools have counselors and social workers available for students to talk to. These professionals can help calm nerves and anxiety, provide someone to listen and help connect students to other community resources. We also have partnered with numerous mental health providers, including culturally specific mental health partners, who provide support through teletherapy for mental health needs. If you find that you or your child are in need of this support, please reach out to your teacher or school counselor. They will help connect you with support.

We developed a way for students to have quick access to emotional wellness resources and support at

the click of a button. Please share this valuable and potentially life saving app with anyone you know: [Youth App Resource](#)

If you notice that your student is becoming distant or showing other signs of depression, we invite you to take advantage of the resources below.

One helpful resource is [How Teens can protect their mental health during COVID19](#). If your student continues to show signs of depression or shares suicidal thoughts, please call the Multnomah County **Mental Health Call Center** at 503-988-4888. Their team of mental health professionals are prepared to help anyone experiencing mental health issues at any time, in any language.

- Free, 24/7 mental health support
- Interpretation services for non-English speakers
- Referral to low-cost or sliding-scale agencies
- Help finding mental health providers
- Information about non-crisis community resources

We also know that many families are struggling with food, clothing and shelter needs. Here is a link to a listing of resources and services available to families in Portland: [Emergency Relief Services for PDX](#)

We offer a number of other student and family supports directly and in partnership with culturally-specific community organizations. You can find our **Menu of Student and Family Supports** by [clicking here](#).

All of these resources and supports will continue to be available to PPS students and families, and I hope that if you or someone you know is in need, you will reach out to your student's teacher, school counselor or school administrator. We are here to help.



Learning Recovery Plan

Finally, we know that distance learning has been challenging for students, staff, and families at PPS and across the country. While some students have found distance learning to be an ideal model, for most students and educators there is no fully adequate replacement for in-person, face-to-face learning, relationship-building and engagement.

It is critically important that students have all necessary support to help them stay on track. That's why our instructional teams are constructing a number of learning recovery opportunities for students, including, but not limited to, **expanded in-person summer programming** we hope to make available for students in June, July, and August. In a future communication, we will share details about these **additional extended learning time opportunities**, and other supports and guidance we intend to make available to students, as we transition our focus and plans to making up for lost instructional time during this pandemic.



Appreciation and the Road Ahead

We know that this update contains a great deal of information, but we want to give you a full picture of our plans for the weeks ahead and a look at the remarkable amount of behind-the-scenes work that has gone on for many months now.

The last year has been tremendously challenging to us as individuals and as a community. And for educators, the lost opportunities to engage students face-to-face has been the toughest thing we have ever faced in our careers.

As difficult as things have been, we are profoundly grateful for our educators, counselors, social workers, administrators, secretaries, nutrition workers, bus drivers, custodians, and so many others, including parents, volunteers and community partners, for their dedication during this unprecedented time to support the children, youth, and families of PPS.

We are inspired by the perseverance demonstrated by our students, who have faced the pandemic and its myriad impacts on their school experience with great courage and determination. Just last week we received [2020 graduation data](#) that showed yet another year-over-year gain by PPS students. This positive trend, one that has continued over recent years, is testament to the hard work that our students and staff have put in to ensure our scholars meet graduation requirements and earn their diplomas, both before and during the pandemic.

We are encouraged by recent developments, including vaccine access for our educators and school staff, and what they mean to our community finally moving beyond the disruption to public education caused COVID-19. We are growing in our confidence that we, with the support of our labor partners, will be able to **move to hybrid instruction** this spring. We are also optimistic that this new federal administration will prioritize support and COVID relief funding to K-12 public education to assist us with confronting this pandemic and help us better ensure we are able to implement a comprehensive set of supports and learning recovery opportunities for our students.

And we are grateful for the collaboration of colleagues who are leading school districts here in Oregon, and across the country, as we all attempt to develop solutions to the common challenges that we all face.

We will be in touch in the coming days with more details to specific school communities as we open limited in-person instruction at identified sites. In the meantime, thank you for your continued patience and understanding.

