

**11.17.20**

## **DCD's Winter Plans for In-Person Learning**

Dear DCD Families:

Following up on our earlier communications about keeping our community safe and open during the fall season and the return to school after Thanksgiving, I would like to provide further details regarding the school's plans for in-person learning this winter. Our intent is to keep DCD open for in-person learning as long as it is safe to do so, and I wanted to share with you the steps we're taking and the data we're following to guide our decision-making.

In many ways the planning for winter was complete when we planned for the opening of school. Our plan for inclement weather days -- either rain or cold -- follows the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) guidelines and best practices related to health and safety. We are writing to share more of the specifics with you so you better understand the measures that are in place to keep our students and staff safe.

It's important to emphasize that the success of these plans is dependent on the choices we all make at home and in school. Especially as we come into the holiday season, please scrutinize all family plans and outside activities with a priority of reducing behavior that could put our community at risk.

### Academics

We are pleased by how the pod structure has supported learning at every grade level. The dedicated teams and small cohorts have allowed us to provide both strong subject area content and engaging interdisciplinary content. We will continue to use the pod model for the foreseeable future, likely even until the end of the year, since it is providing students with variety, consistency, and a team of adults and peers who know them well.

### Air Quality

As the weather grows colder, much attention will be focused on indoor air quality — one of the key elements in any multi-pronged effort to maintain a safe school environment, along with masking, social distancing, good hand hygiene, and testing. DCD has retained air-quality experts to assess our systems and advise on our air quality as we enter the winter months.

To meet or exceed the guidelines established by DESE, we have upgraded our air filtration and HVAC systems to ensure a constant recirculation of fresh air throughout the building. Our system now completely replaces the air several times per hour. We have also installed HEPA air purifiers with UV lighting and ionizers in all classrooms and bathrooms throughout the building, which provide additional layers of protection.

During the winter months we will also continue to leave classroom windows open at least two to three inches, adjusting the heat as necessary, to ensure that fresh air continues to flow into the

building from windows to supplement the exchange of our HVAC systems. Students will be asked to bring clothing appropriate for a range of temperatures. Together with our consultants, we will monitor all of our air quality systems on a regular basis and are prepared to make any warranted changes or improvements.

### Classroom Modifications

While we will continue to use outdoor spaces whenever possible during the winter, we have also reconfigured some of our classroom spaces to accommodate the need for more indoor learning and to improve some of the existing spaces. These changes primarily impact the Middle School, where we have redesignated some of the classrooms to ensure that all classes that normally meet outside will have an appropriate indoor space on a regular basis, and to provide additional flexibility for some classes that currently meet in the Primary Gym.

For instance, one Middle School pod room that was only used twice per day in the fall model will now be used all day, with cleaning in between rounds, and the band room will also be used for classroom space.

We have also developed plans for students to eat lunch indoors safely by utilizing new spaces so social distancing can be maintained while seated. We still hope to eat outside as often as possible, and it's promising for our outdoor plans that NOAA is predicting a warmer than average winter.

### Additional Surveillance Testing

In addition to the surveillance testing we will conduct following the Thanksgiving break, DCD plans to conduct another round of testing following the Winter Break, in January (surveillance testing refers to the method of widespread testing of asymptomatic individuals within a community to help gauge the prevalence of the disease). This will help ensure that students, faculty, and staff who return to campus have tested negative and will provide a new baseline safety profile of our community that will help guide our decision-making about continuing in-person learning (if, for instance, there is a very high positivity rate, we may need to transition in whole or part to distance learning for a period of time). We have not yet finalized the details and timing of the January testing and return to school schedule, as we want to evaluate the Thanksgiving process before moving forward.

### Data Monitoring

The school's COVID-19 Response Team, and especially our Health Office, are closely monitoring the state and town data on cases and community transmission. In recent weeks, the overall state numbers are moving in a concerning direction, as Massachusetts seems to be following a nationwide trend of more daily cases and a rising seven-day average of positive test results.

Nonetheless, we believe the measures DCD has put in place can permit us to remain open for in-person learning, provided we all remain committed to community safety. We have been able to come this far into the year not just because of our strong protocols at school, but also because of the choices our families have made to minimize risky behavior outside of school.

This is a solid model for moving forward, even amid rising case numbers, and is reinforced by studies showing that reopened schools have generally not experienced large COVID-19 outbreaks (a recent Brown University study of about 227,000 kids in all 50 states showed the infection rate was just 0.14% among students and 0.25% percent among staff. Even in high-risk areas of the U.S., the student rates were under 0.5%.(Axios)). In addition, Massachusetts officials announced Friday that all communities in the gray, green and yellow COVID risk categories are expected to have students learning in-person, and even those in the highest-risk red category should consider a hybrid model instead of going fully remote.

Of course, we will continue to analyze the safety data, in consultation with our school physician, the Dedham Board of Health, DESE and other state officials, and will advise you immediately if we believe a change of course is warranted.

Thank you for your continued patience, support, and partnership in providing a meaningful and safe school environment for your children.

Warmly,

Allison D. Webster  
Head of School