



January 7, 2022

Pelham Family,

Once again we find ourselves dealing with a COVID-19 spike, primarily caused by the Omicron variant. These circumstances create a need for us to review past plans and consider our path forward in facing the new wave of cases. We are in frequent conversations with our local medical community and our school nurses, and we are continuously reviewing our data. We have learned that our plans must remain flexible as we see changes with the COVID-19 variants. Based on our discussions, following is what we have learned about the Omicron variant:

- Cases are typically less severe
- Onset of symptoms after exposure is faster (usually in about 3-5 days)
- It is much more contagious than any previous strand
- While less severe, the sheer volume will still lead to some severe cases and stress the medical community as well as other facets of our lives. Scott Harris, the State Health Officer for the Alabama Department of Public Health recently stated, "It will infect everyone in the state, at some point."

Our Board of Education continues to believe that keeping schools open in as safe of a manner as possible remains our biggest priority. We have seen the detrimental impact on students related to school closures and extended periods of remote learning. We need to be in school, students need structure, and closing schools negatively impacts not only students but parents as well.

Knowing these things and knowing that Omicron causes larger numbers yet less severe cases, we are making adjustments to our mitigation levels. Please understand that our Board has varying opinions, just like the public, regarding COVID-19. However, we, as a community and Board, have been able to manage this crisis with less negativity and much more productive civil discourse that has been seen across the country. Our Board believes that using mitigation levels and letting data determine our decision making has helped and continues to be the best approach moving forward. Our mitigation levels and criteria were originally developed for the Delta variant, and we think Omicron requires a reset. Please see the chart below to review our restructured guidelines. We are making these changes knowing full well that circumstances may change. We may learn more about Omicron, new factors may come into play, etc. We will change and amend these guidelines and metrics as needed based on new, credible information.

I do expect January to be a challenging month related to COVID-19. I expect most families will be impacted, absences will occur, and we must keep a mindset of "let's get through this together". I think our biggest challenge will be keeping the appropriate staffing levels to operate our schools. I encourage all parents to develop back up plans. It's possible that bus services may not be available due to lack of staffing or double routing may cause delays. It's possible that certain grade levels or classes could be temporarily closed if we can't find substitutes or

shuffle classrooms. These examples or a variety of other things could happen on short notice, so please be flexible and prepared to adjust.

Our Board and I continue to listen to your concerns. Please remember that during times of increased public interest (COVID-19, school policy issues, zoning, etc.), the number of emails and calls increase to a level that does not allow me to respond to every call, email, or inquiry. However, we do have a system in place to ensure public feedback is shared with the Board members and Superintendent. Emails may be sent to [communications@pelhamcityschools.org](mailto:communications@pelhamcityschools.org). We have someone who reviews those communications, organizes, and sends them to the Superintendent and all Board members. In this manner, we can more consistently receive and review your feedback.

Be safe and stay well,  
Dr. Scott Coefield  
Superintendent  
Pelham City Schools

## **MITIGATION LEVELS (Beginning January 10, 2022)**

The following is a general description of mitigation levels that will be utilized by Pelham City Schools. The levels and metrics utilized are subject to change based on changing circumstances and new knowledge as we learn more about the impact of the Omicron variant.

<b>Mitigation Efforts</b>  <b>Level 1</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Encourage vaccine for all eligible members</li><li>• Continue mitigation efforts related to daily self screening, cleaning and hygiene protocols</li><li>• Face coverings encouraged</li></ul>
Metrics for Level 1:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Minimum positive cases (students / staff)</li><li>• Minimum absences due to COVID</li><li>• Consider community positivity rate trends</li></ul>
<b>Mitigation Efforts</b>  <b>Level 2</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Continue with all Level 1 efforts</li><li>• Consider reasonable physical distancing protocols</li></ul> <p>Note: Due to the heightened transmissibility of the Omicron variant, it is unknown how effective physical distancing is within certain school settings. There may not be a major difference in Level 1 and Level 2.</p>
Metrics for Level 2:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Trending towards 2.0% of positive student cases</li><li>• Trending towards 5% absences due to COVID</li><li>• Consider other factors and illness</li><li>• Consider community positivity rate trends</li></ul>

<b>Mitigation Efforts</b>  <b>Level 3</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continue with all Level 1 and 2 efforts</li> <li>• Universal face coverings required with exceptions in certain situations</li> </ul> <p>Note: While universal face coverings are a controversial topic and some sources state that only N-95 that are properly fitted and worn correctly provide the needed protection against Omicron, our local medical experts still advocate that, while not foolproof, face coverings provide some level of mitigation.</p> <p>Note: A face covering requirement would be our last mitigation effort to avoid school closure. While there may be disagreement about masks, everyone agrees that keeping schools open is imperative. Masking would be our last effort to lessen the spread and keep schools from closing.</p>
Metrics for Level 3:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Trending towards 3.00% of positive student cases</li> <li>• Trending towards 10% absences due to COVID</li> <li>• Consider other factors and illness</li> <li>• Consider community positivity rate trends</li> </ul>
<b>Mitigation Efforts</b>  <b>Level 4</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Short term closure with remote learning to control immediate spread of illness.</b></li> </ul>
Metrics for Level 4:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• High absenteeism in staff that impacts school operations</li> <li>• More than 3.00% of positive student cases</li> <li>• Trending towards 15% absences due to COVID</li> <li>• Consider community positivity rate trends</li> </ul>