



# PELHAM CITY SCHOOLS

August 19, 2021

Pelham Family,

Please take the time to read through this information for some important updates. First, thank you for your support and patience during our first week of school. After some initial issues with traffic, carpool lines, and transportation, we're making adjustments and we expect continued improvements as traffic patterns settle. Please communicate with your school if there are any lingering problems or issues.

Once again, we find ourselves dealing with the impact of COVID-19 as we begin our new school year. We appreciate the cooperation of our students and staff in following the expectations related to our mitigation efforts for health and safety in our schools. We understand that there are varying perspectives on universal face coverings, but we can all agree that we care about the students and employees in our schools. It is imperative that our students see us working as a team to face the challenges of the virus, and I hope we can be a model for other communities in how we handle our differences of opinion, showing that disagreement can be handled in a civil and respectful way.

Please know that emails sent to [communications@pelhamcityschools.org](mailto:communications@pelhamcityschools.org) are forwarded to me and the members of the board of education for review of your feedback and perspective. We prefer that you send emails to the communications email address so they can be compiled and shared efficiently.

More details about COVID-19 and our Operations & Instruction Plans-

- Consultations with local pediatricians and health officials confirm that the Delta variant is more transmissible and virulent than the original strain of COVID-19. There are initial reports of more illness and hospitalizations in student-aged demographics, and the experts are keeping a watchful eye on the impact of the Delta variant in children.
- On the day before school started, we had 21 self-reported positive student cases, or 0.62% of our student population. There were only three times last year during a stretch from November of 2020 to January of 2021 when our student positive case percentage was higher. Further, the community positivity rate has returned to a level that we witnessed last winter, the same time when we experienced the highest numbers in our schools.
- As mentioned in our Operations & Instruction Plans, we believe students benefit from in-person learning, and we are working diligently to keep our schools open. Given the transmissibility of the Delta variant and number of reported cases prior to the start of school, we feel confident that Mitigation Level 3 with universal masking and some exceptions is the appropriate level at this time. We are already seeing some schools in Alabama transition to short term closures due to spikes in absences due to the Delta variant.

- Our data tells us that we had a 66% decrease in visits to our health rooms last school year due to our mitigation efforts and the cooperation of our students, staff, and parents. We know that daily self-screening at home, social distancing when possible, hand washing, cleaning, and wearing masks were all components of last year's plan that helped us control the spread of the original strain of COVID in our schools.
- We are making our Mitigation Level decisions, and will make changes when appropriate, based on the continuous analysis of our data, speaking with local health experts, determining reasonable solutions, and remaining flexible.
- We will continue our practice of updating the COVID dashboard on the system website on Friday afternoons.
- We have now updated our mitigation levels to include more detail as described below.

## MITIGATION LEVELS

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 Delta variant.**

<b>Mitigation Efforts</b>  <b>Level 1</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Encourage vaccine for all eligible employees and students</li> <li>• Continue mitigation efforts related to daily self-screening, cleaning, and hygiene protocols</li> <li>• Face coverings encouraged</li> </ul>
Current 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 (focused efforts to reduce student interactions in classrooms and other operations within the school)</li> </ul>
Current metrics for Level 2:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Less than 0.50% of positive student cases</li> <li>• Less than 5% absences due to COVID</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 (exception examples listed in the section under Face Coverings in the Operations and Instruction Plans)</li> <li>• Utilize more strict physical distancing protocols within the school when possible</li> </ul>
Current metrics for Level 3:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 0.50% to 3.00% of positive student cases</li> <li>• Less than 15% absences due to COVID</li> <li>• Consider community positivity rate trends</li> </ul>

<b>Mitigation Efforts</b>  <b>Level 4</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continue with all Level 1, 2, and 3 efforts</li> <li>• Universal face coverings required (fewer exceptions)</li> <li>• Requests for short term remote learning option will be considered</li> </ul>
Current metrics for Level 4:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Same as Level 3, except requests for short term remote learning option will be considered when: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ community positivity rates are trending higher and/or</li> <li>◦ we are trending to more positive student cases (&gt;1%) and/or</li> <li>◦ severity of reported pediatric cases warrant providing a remote option for students</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<b>Mitigation Efforts</b>  <b>Level 5</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continue with all Level 1, 2, 3, and 4 efforts</li> <li>• Alternating day schedule implemented to increase physical distancing or short term closure to control immediate spread</li> </ul>
Current metrics for Level 5:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More than 3.00% of positive student cases</li> <li>• More than 15% absences due to absences</li> <li>• Consider community positivity rate trends</li> <li>• High absenteeism in staff that impacts operations</li> </ul>
<b>Mitigation Efforts</b>  <b>Level 6</b>  <b>School closures by state or local officials</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Remote learning via the learning management system utilized by the classroom teacher</li> </ul>

## REMOTE LEARNING

Please review the following information related to the addition of short term remote learning as an option at Mitigation Level 4.

- Education and medical experts along with most families of school-aged students agree that students benefit from in-person learning in the school setting. Our system also agrees and has placed a priority on in-person learning. However, we do understand that there are families with circumstances that create concern for in-person learning when community transmission of the virus and positive cases in our schools reaches higher levels.
- At Mitigation Level 4, we will consider requests for a short term remote learning option.
- Families must understand that the remote learning will not be a replication of the student experience for in-person learning.
- Teachers will provide assignments via Google classroom or other appropriate learning management systems. There will not be dedicated remote teachers. Teachers will provide remote assignments to the best of their abilities as this is an added responsibility to their normal duties.

- This should be considered a short term option. It is not the school's desire to maintain remote learning. It is only being offered as a short term solution when our metrics indicate that remote learning should become an option for students.
- If we enter Mitigation Level 4, parents who have concerns regarding in-person learning may submit a request for remote learning. The request would be granted as a three week commitment so families and teachers could plan accordingly.
- Requests for additional time on remote learning may be submitted if the schools remain at Mitigation Level 4.
- Blended learning will not be an option. Families should strongly consider that the remote learning option is for those with health concerns who do not want their students interacting with other students in the school or extracurricular settings.

## **WHAT'S NEXT**

- We continue to monitor our data and follow the advice of local pediatricians and health experts. We will keep you informed by updating our COVID dashboard each week.
- Our next Board of Education meetings will be held on August 30, 2021. We will provide a COVID update, review our first two weeks of data, and discuss our mitigation levels. Due to the limited space at our central office, we are making special arrangements to accommodate the public by having two meetings. 1) We will have a Special-Called Meeting at 7:30 AM at our Central Office. This meeting will be live streamed and posted on our website for viewing. With social distancing protocols, there will be limited seating available so we encourage people to watch the live stream. The Board will conduct other business in addition to the COVID update including a review of the 2021-2022 budget. 2) The regularly scheduled board meeting will take place at Pelham Park Middle School. The meeting will be held in the gym at 6:30 PM (access the gym through the back doors at PPMS). The same COVID review and updates will take place, and we will follow our normal board agenda.

We're grateful for the incredible group of students, staff, and parents in Pelham. We may have continued challenges as we facilitate our school year during the pandemic, but I feel certain we can pull together, exhibit The Pelham Way and make it a great year.

Sincerely,

Dr. Scott Coefield  
Superintendent  
Pelham City Schools