

Full-time In Person Learning and Full-time Remote Learning - April 5 FAQ as of 3.12.21

The following questions were discussed during the Q&A session on Thursday, March 11. This document will be updated with further questions as much as possible prior to Tuesday, March 16.

Commissioner Riley stated that for elementary schools, remote and hybrid learning models will no longer count towards meeting the required student learning hours as of Monday, April 5, 2021. So, if I choose remote, are my kids meeting the requirements and will they move onto a higher grade next year?

The students in our remote program will receive credit for their school hours in the same way that our in-person students will. Districts that *only* have a remote program will not be able to count hours toward their requirements, but Belmont is not in that situation. Students in our remote program will be promoted to the next grade just as they normally would be and just as our in-person students will be. The state recognizes both of our programs.

How is Belmont supporting school staff to get vaccinations?

We have been working hard to support our educators (teachers as well as other school staff) in getting vaccinated as quickly as possible. For many months we have worked in partnership with the Belmont Education Association, Senator Brownsberger, Representative Rogers, and neighboring schools and districts to advocate for educator vaccines and dedicated vaccination days for school staff.

We are providing days off for our staff to use when they get vaccinated, and days off for people who don't feel well after their second vaccination. We are providing coverage in the schools in order to remove as many barriers as possible to educators getting vaccinated. We are partnering with our educators as much as we can to ensure that they are vaccinated as quickly as possible.

We are also grateful to a community partnership with Belmont Helps that is helping our educators find and sign up for vaccination appointments.

It is very hard to make this decision without knowing who our child's teacher will be under each scenario. Will we know who our child's teacher will be before we have to make our decision? If not, could we delay having to make this decision until we know if our teacher will be a "new hire" or current Belmont teacher?

Unfortunately, in order for us to be able to organize our approximately 1600 elementary students, we need to see the results of the survey before we can tell you who your student's teacher will be. It is only with the survey results that we will be able to do the work of assigning teachers to students, and students to teachers. We won't know how to allocate our teachers until we know how many students at each school and in each grade will be attending in-person and remote.

We appreciate that it is difficult to make this decision without the certainty of knowing who your student's teacher will be. Our teachers and principals will work together closely in order to minimize the number of students who need to change teachers. Our educators will also collaborate closely in order to facilitate any transitions between teachers. Families will also have two options for changing their decision (in-person or remote) through the spring if that is something that they would like to do.

How will you decide which teachers teach remote students and which teach in-person students?

Once we know the numbers of remote and in-person students, we will look at the options school by school. Our elementary principals have consistently advocated for keeping students connected to their

school to the greatest extent possible. So we will first look at each school and whether the numbers in that school support our ability to make in-person and remote classrooms of just that school's students. If that is not operationally possible because of the specific breakdown of in-person and remote students, we will then begin to look at forming classes between partner schools. In a perfect world we will be able to accommodate all remote and in-person students with the teachers at their current school. We hope that the numbers will support this approach but will have to wait and see what happens when families make their choices.

Will the remote only classroom have different teachers/subs every day or every week, or will the same teacher stay with the class for the rest of the school year?

Remote students will have the same teacher from April 5th through the end of the year. This teacher will be dedicated to teaching the remote students *only* and will not have to split their attention between groups of remote and in-person students. This is one of the benefits that we believe will provide a more robust educational experience to all students, whether in-person or remote.

Will there be planning between my child's current teacher and the new teacher? What specifically will that entail? For children who are getting new teachers, what will be done to prepare and transition those kids?

The elementary principals have given this topic a great deal of thought and will work hard to support all children who need to transition to a new teacher. They have consulted with our partners at McLean Hospital and discussed social-emotional strategies for helping students and families, including:

- Marking the moment in a meaningful way
- Talking to the students about transitions and how to identify and manage the feelings that may come with transitions
- Supporting parents and giving them ideas about positive ways to talk to their children about this transition

Our principals and teachers will also be extremely thoughtful about how to reassign children if that is necessary. Teachers who know your child best will be involved in making the transition as seamless as possible.

Will you have a group meeting for parents considering the remote school option to voice their concerns over the changes that are coming our way?

Yes. Families considering the remote option are welcome to join a [Zoom session](#) on Monday, March 15, 9-10am to discuss their particular questions and concerns.

What will the remote daily schedule be?

The remote schedule will be very similar to the in-person schedule. They will both be similar to our pre-COVID school schedule. They will include morning meeting, academic blocks, specials, lunch, and recess.

How will specials be delivered for remote learners? Will PE be included?

Specials (including art, music, and PE) will be provided through synchronous remote classes. Specialist teachers will have specific periods in their days for teaching remote classes. As much as possible, we hope to keep the same specialist teachers working with the same students they are currently teaching. If remote classes have to partner across schools (based on the number of remote students per grade level in each school), then specialists for these classes could be from either partner school.

Will additional support staff be available in remote classes to support breakout rooms?

As the remote classes are formed, we will continue to work with teachers and faculty to deploy support staff to further support remote and in-person learners. These specific schedules and supports will

depend on the number of students in each class (remote and in-person) and the needs of students and teachers in each class.

Teachers teaching remote classes will continue to be able to use breakout rooms as they have throughout the year during remote classes. In our current platform, teachers are able to monitor all rooms at once. Teachers can move back and forth between breakout rooms and keep all rooms open at the same time.

How will tents be used, and for which students?

Large tents will be going up at each elementary school in the next couple of weeks. They will be a great addition, as they will provide additional covered, outdoor learning space for students. The challenge is that they will take up playground space, which is also limited at some schools. Principals have made strategic decisions about where to locate each tent so that they can maximize play space.

My child is on an IEP with services from several different providers. How will these be continued? Will she keep the same staff? Will the schedule have to change again? Will her small group sessions stay with the same peers?

Our goal is to create a schedule that allows students to stay with their current liaison. We recognize that there have been a lot of shifts for our special education students and teachers and will prioritize stability for this community as much as possible.

Will my student, who is on an IEP, stay with the same peers?

We are not yet sure. When schedules change, they may change for any particular student depending on the number of in-person and remote students in their grade, including students on IEPs. Both in-person and remote students may have to change classes and/or teachers. We will try as hard as possible to at least keep students with an IEP connected to their main liaison.

All students on IEPs and all of our English learners will get the appropriate number of services and minutes provided to them by law. It may take a different shape that it has earlier in the year but we will ensure that this will happen.

Regarding English learners: It will be a challenge to potentially have to shift our students into different cohorts, but it is something that we are ready to do. This is a good time of year for EL to be making changes because many students have made a lot of progress in their language skills. It is part of our normal practice to reorganize students in the middle of the year and may enable us to make more appropriate placements for many students.

How much will in-person students continue to use their computers for learning?

We are a 1:1 district, which means that each of our students has their own, district-provided device to use as a learning tool. When in-person students return full-time to the classroom our goal is to use screens less frequently and return to a situation where the teacher is the focal point of the classroom.

That said, teachers will still use screens (including their smart boards and student iPads) as teaching tools where they see fit. Our students are now very capable technology users and we can use that to our benefit. iPads give students a way to collaborate with each other at a time when they are still not allowed to sit close to one another. They have also been useful tools in allowing in-person and remote students to collaborate and to play together. Our educators and students have all become very skillful at using technology as a tool and will continue to do so where appropriate.

Please explain in detail how music classes will be safely conducted.

Per updated DESE guidance, students must be at least 10 feet apart from one another when singing. Therefore, any music classes that involve singing will happen either outside (possibly under tents) or in other large spaces where there is space to ensure this level of distancing. When music classes do not involve singing, they will take place in students' classrooms in order to minimize student traffic through the school.

Arto Asadoorian (our Director of Fine and Performing Arts) and his team have been incredibly creative throughout the year and will continue to develop innovative ways of working with students under the current constraints.

What will recess look like?

The details of recess will largely differ school by school because each school has a different campus layout and different number of students to consider. We also have to work around the new tents that are being added to each school's outdoor space. These tents will have many benefits, but one downside is that they do take up part of our outdoor play space. We have worked to situate them strategically on each site to maximize spaces where students can have recess.

Each elementary principal will work closely with the Board of Health to ensure that recess plans are safe and in accordance with CDC guidelines. There will likely be a rotation of students through our outdoor spaces to ensure that we have a small enough number of students to enable proper distancing.

Can you provide more details about lunch?

Lunch will happen either in the cafeteria, gymnasiums, or outside. Students will eat lunch distanced 6 feet apart (from edge of chair to edge of chair, per DESE guidance), each at their own desk/table. There will be some form of assigned seating (for potential contact tracing purposes), although the student will not necessarily have the same seat each day. Desks will be sanitized in between students. There is no need for plexiglass barriers because students will all face the same direction and will be properly distanced.

We will offer school lunch, for free, to any student who would like it. This is being done in partnership with a federal USDA initiative. Students will move through the lunch line much as they have in the past, though they will not touch any pin pad or device. There will be no monetary transactions or payments. The choices for lunch may be more limited than they have been in the past, but there will still be a hot lunch option available every day. Students can also bring their own lunch from home.

May I bring my in-person student home for lunch each day?

We understand that some parents would be more comfortable bringing their students home for lunch. We are looking into the logistics of how this will work and will communicate a decision as soon as we make it.

Please explain in an in-person classroom setting how many children you expect to be identified as a close contact if one child tests positive?

The WHO and CDC have allowed us to reduce the 6 foot rule as long as we maintain our commitment to using other mitigation measures such as masking and hand washing/sanitizing. They did NOT allow for any relaxing of the 6 foot close contact guideline. Therefore, if there is a positive case in school, all individuals who were within 6 feet of that person for 15 minutes or more will be required to quarantine. The whole class will not have to quarantine, but it is possible that several members of the class will need to.

Teachers are well-versed in understanding how to minimize and track the amount of time any two individuals spend within 6 feet of each other. When we have a positive case the nurses speak to each teacher who has had contact with the person in question in order to very specifically identify close contacts. We have a lot of practice doing this from our time in the hybrid model and feel confident that we have a process in place that will continue to serve us well.

Parents might find it interesting to read a [study](#) that was recently released in the press saying that there is only a very small difference between transmission in a 6-foot distanced classroom and 3-foot distanced classroom.

What will happen to in-person students who have to quarantine?

We will handle this situation in the same way that, pre-Covid, we handled any situation where a student had a medical need to be out of school for a sustained period of time. In these cases our practice has always been to have the classroom teacher supply work to be done at home, and to offer the student a certain number of hours working one-on-one or in a small group with a professional tutor.

Some parents have asked why students will not be able to live-stream into their classrooms while they are quarantining. We feel that this would undermine the educational value of our new remote/in-person system, which is that teachers will be able to focus entirely on one mode of teaching. There will not be live-streaming in grades K-4 after April 5 so that the in-person teacher can focus their attention on the group of students in the classroom that will be larger than in the current hybrid model.

Why do close contacts have to quarantine for 14 days?

We continue to follow CDC guidance and the advice of the Belmont Board of Health when determining our quarantining procedures. CDC guidance recommends 14 days of quarantining following exposure to a Covid-positive individual.

In some cases related to adults who will suffer economic hardship if they are required to quarantine for 14 days, the CDC guidance reduces the number of days needed to quarantine so that these individuals may return to work. This guidance is not extended to students in school. We have seen students test positive on day 10 or 11 following exposure to a Covid-positive individual and we believe that a 14-day quarantine period is the safest option at this point.

We will continue to follow CDC guidance on quarantining.

What is the status of surveillance COVID testing for our in-person elementary school kids?

The state has provided us with six weeks of free surveillance testing, a plan that came together quickly during the month of March and which we have implemented at the high school. We chose the high school as our pilot site because high school students move between classes and are therefore potentially in contact with a greater number of people each day. The majority of our peer towns have chosen the same approach, either beginning testing with their senior class or with their entire high school. Two hundred students and 40 staff members at the high school are participating in this pilot project. If we find that the data we receive is helpful in our effort to provide a safer school environment, we will work to expand testing to a greater number of students.

What mitigation efforts will be in place besides social distancing?

We are asking our entire community to rededicate ourselves to a range of mitigation efforts - using the symptom tracker daily, masking, washing and sanitizing hands, etc. A community-wide effort on all of these elements is necessary in order for us to be able to hold school each day for our in-person and our remote learners.

Masking, in particular, will be more important than ever. Our school nurses will be sending out lots of information about masking, especially about ensuring that your child's mask has a proper fit.

Please continue to reach out to your school nurses if you have questions about any of our mitigation measures.

What will the distancing be in my child's classroom? Will the distancing in my child's classroom be at least 6 feet? Knowing this would help me make an informed choice.

The exact distancing will depend on the particular classroom and the number of students. We know that each classroom will have at least 3' of distancing (from edge of chair to edge of chair) between students, and some may have up to 6' of distancing. We cannot guarantee 6' of distancing. If that is something you find essential, the remote schooling option might be the best choice for your family.

What will happen with in person learning if community spread increases to high levels again?

The Commissioner of Education and our Department of Elementary and Secondary Education have been very clear that they will not retreat from in-person learning. They are relying on the data suggesting that most spread happens in the home rather than in school. I do not anticipate that they would allow us to change back to a hybrid model this spring.

If there is a spike of cases in Belmont, we would have the option of pivoting back to a fully remote program for a short period of time. We will rely on advice from the Belmont Board of Health and from our Director of Nursing Services, Beth Rumley.

Transportation

DESE guidance says that buses may operate at the same capacity as they did prior to Covid, which means up to three students per bus bench. Depending on the number of students who opt to take the bus, we are very hopeful that we will have fewer students per bench and that we will be able to provide more distancing.

In the case of our buses to and from Boston, even if 100% of students choose in-person learning and opt to take the bus, we will have no more than two students per bench, and in most cases there will be only one student per bench.

Students will wear masks and have assigned seating on the bus. All windows will be open at least 2".

We encourage families to consider alternate modes of transportation to and from school if possible.

Our goal is to hire monitors for every bus. Please consider volunteering or applying for a position.

Is it only remote students who will have new teachers?

No. Both in-person and remote students may end up with new teachers. We will balance the assignment of new teachers between remote and in-person classrooms. It will be done thoughtfully and based on the number of students in each cohort at each school.

We posted the jobs on Wednesday - in-person and remote-only positions so that applicants know that there are two different roles available.

Any final thoughts?

We know that this transition may be difficult and understand that it has been an exhausting year for parents for many reasons. We appreciate your partnership in working toward the best possible educational situation for all of our students.

We are very happy to be able to end the school year with 5 days/week of consistent, full days for all students. It will give us more time in school for both remote and in-person learners, as well as more time for services for English learners and special education students. We are pleased to be able to end the year in this way.

We are also happy to have the ability to have students in school full-time so that we can learn and use the summer to address any lingering issues prior to our return to school in the fall.

We are also encouraged by the data, which shows cases decreasing in our community, our state, and our nation. We want students to be able to be together if that is the right choice for their family.

Please be in touch with any of the following people if you have further questions:

- For questions related to specific schools and daily educational routines, elementary school principals [Danielle Betancourt](#), [Seeley Okie](#), [Anita Mecklenburg](#), and [Heidi Paisner-Roffman](#)
- For questions related to lunch, [Dustin O'Brien](#)
- For questions about English learners, [Lindsay Rinder](#)
- For questions about special education, [Ken Kramer](#)
- For general or district-wide questions, [John Phelan](#)