

**Please Note: These minutes are pending Board approval.  
Board of Education  
Newtown, Connecticut**

Minutes of the Board of Education meeting held on June 21, 2021 at 6:30 p.m. in the Reed Intermediate School Library.

M. Ku, Chair	L. Rodrigue
D. Delia, Vice Chair	A. Uberti
D. Cruson, Secretary (absent)	1 Staff
D. Leidlein	15 Public
J. Vouros	1 Press
R. Harriman-Stites	
D. Zukowski	

Mrs. Ku called the meeting to order at 6:30 p.m. and stated it was being recorded and live streamed.

Item 1 – Pledge of Allegiance

Item 2 – Presentation of Plan for Safe Return to In-person Instruction and Continuity of Services for the 2021-2022 School Year

Dr. Rodrigue said this plan should be viewed as evolving and needs to be posted publicly by June 23. She had spoken with our Director of Health with her intentions and evaluated the data we had from the first day we shut down last March. She also reflected on the multitude of vaccination clinics we had and those across the state and also reviewed the stakeholder feedback. She was mindful of the opinions along the way and stated that we will return to school in full next year.

Dr. Rodrigue presented the five areas the Connecticut public school districts had to consider when developing this plan which include Health and Safety Strategies, Continuity of Services, Public Comment, Periodic Review Process and Understandable and Uniform Format. She doesn't know what changes will be made from the State but she feels opening up in full is the right way to go. Our top priority is the safety of our students and staff. She also thanked Donna Culbert for her help.

Item 3 – Public Participation

Stephanie Stroeve, 7 Possum Ridge Road, said this was an excellent plan and supports most of it. She was disappointed about the quarantining. She can't imagine a whole class using Google Meet. She would love to see the mental health component moved into the chart. Elementary students need support also. She also mentioned working on the health metrics.

Janet Kuzma, 12 The Boulevard, thanked Dr. Rodrigue and she feels like they were heard. She's very pleased her child can make the choice.

Jenn Larkin, 10 Marlin Road, thanked the Board for hearing them. It's a fantastic plan. Regarding co-teaching, it sounds phenomenal and they should do it at the elementary level.

Item 4 – Discussion and Possible Vote on Plan

MOTION: Mr. Delia moved that the Board of Education approve the plan for safe return to in-person instruction and continuity of services for the 2021-2022 school year. Mrs. Harriman-Stites seconded.

Mrs. Harriman-Stites appreciated the thought that went into this plan and likes the ideas of putting mental health in the chart. She asked what the staff reaction was to the plan.

Dr. Rodrigue met with the union and focused on mitigation strategies and going back in full. Many staff have been vaccinated and feel indifferent about entering the buildings with or without masks.

MOTION: Mr. Delia moved to amend the motion to add a mental health piece to the chart. Mrs. Harriman-Stites seconded. Motion passes unanimously.

Ms. Zukowski wanted to know the options for a medically fragile child unable to wear a mask. Dr. Rodrigue said it was very narrow as to what constituted not able to wear a mask. We did not have any. Most of those students were in cohort D but it's something the nurses work on with the parents.

Ms. Zukowski referred to cohort D students and wanted to know the options for extremely fragile students.

Dr. Rodrigue said they are exempt and don't need to wear a mask.

Mr. Vouros stated that since there will be no early release on Wednesdays if it was possible for students to remain in school for the last two hours so teachers could work with the students that need the help to catch up.

Dr. Rodrigue said we have been working with principals and staff as to when students can be supported. The issue she sees is more instructional time lost. We lost a lot which is why we decided to not take Wednesday afternoons off. Not every student will need that support.

Mrs. Uberti noted that we don't feel we have fully assessed the degree of learning loss yet. We are looking forward to a normal atmosphere again. We are working with principals about creative ways to provide support before and after school.

Mrs. Ku referred to quarantining and asked if only direct contacts will be contacted. Dr. Rodrigue said everyone was contacted back 48 hours.

Donna Culbert, Director of Health, stated we always notify contacts although there are times we aren't absolutely sure. It lets people be mindful of symptoms. Regarding the metrics, sometimes exposure takes place from an event but it could have happened elsewhere.

Mrs. Harriman-Stites asked that regarding volunteers, what process will ensure a person will be vaccinated.

Dr. Rodrigue said they will have to show us their card.

Mrs. Ku asked if staff have to wear a mask if not fully vaccinated.

Dr. Rodrigue said we typically do the same thing as we do with students and will make it optional with staff. No teacher she spoke to will come into a school without a mask if not vaccinated. We felt it should be optional for all, but not for volunteers.

Mrs. Ku had mixed feelings about this. The district is responsible for the students and we employ the staff.

MOTION: Ms. Zukowski moved to amend the motion to add that unvaccinated staff who work closely with medically fragile children must wear a mask. Mr. Delia seconded.

Mrs. Ku asked if we are legally able to ask staff for their vaccination record.

Dr. Rodrigue said we shouldn't be asking per legal counsel.

Mrs. Harriman-Stites said it was a consistency issue. If we ask volunteers, it's important enough to ask staff who work with students. If not, we shouldn't ask volunteers.

Dr. Rodrigue said we consider the staff as the school community. If students can come in without a mask, it's for staff also.

Mrs. Ku can't support this motion as it is because she has an issue with anyone having to show a vaccination record. She liked the way it was worded for volunteers.

Vote: 6 nays. Motion fails.

MOTION: Mrs. Ku moved to amend the motion to read that all adults working with students should wear a mask unless fully vaccinated. Mr. Vouros seconded.

Mr. Delia suggested instead of using "should wear a mask" to use "will be encouraged to wear a mask." We can't tell people to wear a mask.

Vote: 5 ayes, 1 nay (Mrs. Leidlein) Motion passes.

MOTION: Mrs. Harriman-Stites moved to amend the motion to read that volunteers working with students should wear a mask unless fully vaccinated. Mr. Delia seconded.

Mrs. Leidlein said there is a big difference between volunteer and staff member and felt like it was lessening the language if we used "should" instead of "will be encouraged."

Dr. Rodrigue noted we decided volunteers should wear a mask if unvaccinated.

Vote: 6 nays. Motion fails.

Mrs. Harriman-Stites referred to the mask section which states that unvaccinated students don't have to wear a mask. There's a different standard for staff and volunteers.

Mrs. Uberti said adults who regularly work with students would exclude volunteers because they are not regularly working with students.

MOTION: Mrs. Harriman-Stites moved to amend the motion to move the sentence about masks from the volunteers section and put it in the masks section after the sentence we just approved in the previous motion. Full section should now read "all adults working with students should wear a mask unless fully vaccinated. However, volunteers working with students will be asked to wear a mask unless fully vaccinated." Ms. Zukowski seconded.

Vote 5 ayes, 1 nay (Debbie Leidlein) Motion passes.

Mr. Delia asked if we were sending a letter to the Governor with the plan. It might be important for our input to be heard.

Dr. Rodrigue said this goes to the State Department of Education but a letter can go from the Board.

Vote on plan: Motion passes unanimously.

MOTION: Mr. Delia moved that the Board of Education go into executive session to approve the salary adjustment and one-year contract extension for the Assistant Superintendent per the Superintendent's recommendation. Mr. Vouros seconded. Motion passes unanimously.

Item 5 – Executive Session

Executive session began at 8:34 p.m. and ended at 9:25 p.m.

MOTION: Mr. Delia moved that the Board of Education approve the salary adjustment and one-year contract extension for the Assistant Superintendent per the Superintendent's recommendation. Mr. Vouros seconded. Motion passes unanimously.

MOTION: Mr. Delia moved to adjourn. Mr. Vouros seconded. Motion passes unanimously.

Item – 6 Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 9:26 p.m.

Respectfully submitted:

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Michelle Ku  
Chair



*At Our Core*

# **Newtown Public Schools Return to School Plan**

**Fall 2021**

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## Introduction

Following a return to school in the fall of 2020, staff and school leaders navigated immense challenges in an effort to provide educational services, both in-person and through remote learning, for more than 4,000 Newtown Public School students. Our district leadership teams continued to ensure all students had access to appropriate technology resources. Preparations were put in place to ensure the safety of students and staff, including a suite of mitigation strategies (e.g., social distancing, masks, hand washing, and sanitizing), recommended by the Department of Public Health (DPH) in alignment with the Centers for Disease Control (CDC). When classroom instruction moved to remote learning, teachers coordinated instructional technology and digital resources so that both in-class and distance learners could access information, engage in activities, make connections, and receive ongoing support. As partners with the district, parents and caregivers turned kitchens, living rooms, and home offices into makeshift classrooms to support their children.

Throughout the pandemic, the Superintendent of Schools worked closely with the Newtown Director of Health to monitor local and State health metrics in order to assess the feasibility of various learning models (remote, hybrid, in-person). After moving between hybrid and remote learning, Newtown Public Schools moved to a full in-person model in January of 2021. While teaching and learning during a global pandemic prompted a plethora of educational changes, the commitment by staff, leaders, and caregivers to support students helped us maintain safe and productive learning environments.

Recently, the Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) reported that by April 30th nearly 82.7 Connecticut school districts were offering in-person instruction, and by the week of May 3-7 no district was fully remote. As health metrics continue to improve and the percentage of vaccinated individuals increases, Newtown Public Schools anticipates a return to full, in-person learning in the fall of 2021. The American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund (ARP ESSER) has granted the State of Connecticut funding to ensure districts are given ample opportunity "...to develop bold, high-impact plans to address the substantial disruptions to student learning, interpersonal interactions, and social-emotional well-being."

The staff and leadership of Newtown Public Schools have learned many lessons from the challenges faced throughout the pandemic. While we are prepared to address learning gaps, we remain equally inspired to transform our practices so they continue to provide high-quality, innovative learning experiences for all students. Although our plan focuses on an in-person learning model, it may evolve based on health metrics and any future requirements by the State of Connecticut.



Dr. Lorrie Rodrigue  
Superintendent of Schools

## Planning for the Fall of 2021

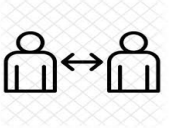
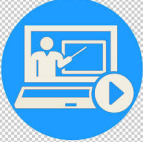




Newtown Public Schools has strived to find a path toward safe, in-person learning as we approach the 2021-22 school year. There are five areas that Connecticut public school districts must consider when developing the Safe Return to In-Person Instruction and Continuity of Services Plan: **I. Health and Safety Strategies II. Continuity of Services III. Public Comment IV. Periodic Review Process V. Understandable and Uniform Format**







### I. Health and Safety Strategies








The Newtown Public School's *Return to School* plan outlines our efforts to provide safe, in-person learning at all levels. The Newtown Board of Education adopted policies, including Policy 6172.61 Distance Learning and 6114.8 Emergencies and Disaster Preparedness to address remote learning, as well as health and safety protocols during the pandemic. We will continue to have discussions with our local health director and review guidance from the State DPH to monitor and adjust our health and safety practices as needed. As we return to school in the fall of 2021, we anticipate that COVID infection rates and trends in our local community and across the State of Connecticut will inform the evolution of our plan.

<b>Health and Safety Strategies for In-Person Learning</b>		
 <b>In-person Learning</b>	<p>As long as health metrics at the local level continue to improve, and without any new State mandates or executive orders in place, pre-K-12 will resume <b>in-person learning with continuity of all services</b> beginning August 2021.</p> <p><b>Cohort D will no longer be necessary as an option for families.</b> Newtown Middle School and Newtown High School will no longer require daily early dismissal. All elementary schools, as well as Reed Intermediate School, will no longer require early dismissal on Wednesdays.</p>	✓
 <b>Masks</b>	<p>It is our on-going interest and intent to create and maintain an environment that is conducive to students' health and well-being. Newtown Public Schools will only mandate masks in schools, for both students and adults, when required by executive orders or requirements by the State. <b>All students and staff will have the option to mask in our buildings, classrooms, and buses.</b></p> <p>Adults working with students should wear a mask unless fully vaccinated. However, volunteers working with students will be asked to wear a mask unless fully vaccinated.</p>	✓



 <p><b>Social Distance</b></p>	<p>Newtown schools will encourage <b>social distancing</b> in accordance with recommendations from DPH and the Centers for Disease Control (CDC).</p> <p>Desk shields will no longer be utilized.</p>	<p>✓</p>
 <p><b>Digital Learning</b></p>	<p>While remote learning (Cohort D) will not be offered in the fall, <b>digital and blended learning opportunities</b> will remain an integral part of instruction, when appropriate.</p>	<p>✓</p>
 <p><b>Cohorting</b></p>	<p>Classroom groups and/or clusters at the K-6 level serve as natural <b>cohorts</b> which will support contact tracing, as needed. Students at this level will travel to and from specials, lunch and recess as they had prior to COVID.</p> <p>Students in grades 7 through 12 will continue in non-cohorted classes, including lunch.</p>	<p>✓</p>
 <p><b>Lunch/ Cafeteria</b></p>	<p>All <b>lunches will be served in the cafeteria</b>, as health metrics permit, with physical distancing to the greatest extent possible. Adjustments may be made if required by the state of Connecticut.</p> <p><b>Cafeteria meals will continue to be provided to students at no cost until June 30, 2022.</b></p>	<p>✓</p>
 <p><b>Recess/ Outdoor Activities</b></p>	<p>Masks will not be required for any <b>outdoor activities</b>, including PE and recess. Teachers will be encouraged to utilize outdoor teaching spaces, as appropriate.</p> <p>Shared use of playground and PE equipment will be allowed and equipment will be <b>periodically cleaned and disinfected.</b></p>	<p>✓</p>
 <p><b>Music and Art</b></p>	<p>Music, including choral and instrumental groups and ensembles, will be <b>permitted to practice and perform</b> following guidance issued by the State of Connecticut and National Association for Music Education (NAfME). Shared use of materials and equipment in art and unified arts will be allowed. Materials and equipment will be periodically cleaned and disinfected.</p>	<p>✓</p>

 <p><b>Athletics</b></p>	<p>Middle and high school sports will continue to follow <b>CIAC guidelines for fall, winter and spring sports.</b></p>	<p>✓</p>
 <p><b>Clubs/Activities</b></p>	<p>All clubs and activities will resume in full this fall.</p>	<p>✓</p>
 <p><b>Training</b></p>	<p>All staff will receive ongoing professional development and training in any <b>health safety protocols</b> in place as required by the State of CT.</p>	<p>✓</p>
 <p><b>Illness</b></p>	<p>To continue to maintain a safe learning environment, parents and caregivers will need to <b>keep students home when ill.</b></p> <p>Parents will need to inform the school nurse if students are out ill.</p> <p>Families and staff should notify the nurse if they (or their students) have had contact with someone who is positive for COVID-19.</p>	<p>✓</p>
 <p><b>Sanitization</b></p>	<p>All facilities will be <b>cleaned</b> and disinfected in accordance with DPH and CDC guidelines.</p>	<p>✓</p>
 <p><b>Ventilation</b></p>	<p>Enhancements have been made to existing HVAC systems to increase <b>ventilation</b> rates in accordance with State DPH guidelines. For schools and classrooms without HVAC systems, air purifiers with HEPA filters are in place.</p>	<p>✓</p>

 <p><b>Transportation</b></p>	<p><b>Transportation</b> will resume at capacity. While we encourage unvaccinated students to protect themselves on buses by wearing a mask, masks will remain optional unless otherwise required by the State of Connecticut.</p>	✓
 <p><b>Quarantining</b></p>	<p>We will continue to follow the DPH and CDC guidance regarding <b>quarantine</b> and isolation, currently requiring 7 days of quarantine (day 5 negative test). Vaccinated individuals will not be required to quarantine or isolate if asymptomatic. Only direct contacts will be notified.</p>	✓
 <p><b>Support for Quarantined Students</b></p>	<p>Students who are required to quarantine will be provided <b>assignments through Google Classroom</b> (asynchronous) and supported by an online tutor/mentor to maintain engagement in learning.</p>	✓
 <p><b>Covid Testing</b></p>	<p>We will continue to <b>provide testing</b> for school community members through our Newtown School-based Health Center located at Newtown Middle School.</p>	✓
 <p><b>Volunteers</b></p>	<p>Volunteers will be permitted to visit schools as long as health metrics allow.</p> <p><b>Volunteers working with students will be asked to wear a mask unless fully vaccinated.</b></p>	✓
 <p><b>Vaccination</b></p>	<p>We will continue to support the vaccination of staff and eligible students through our local Newtown Health Department and other community partners.</p>	✓
 <p><b>Mental Health</b></p>	<p>Programs and services across the district, including counseling, mindfulness at the elementary and intermediate levels, SOS (Signs of Suicide), QPR training, Hope Squad, and Kids in Crisis at the secondary level, will continue to support students' mental health and well-being.</p>	

## II. Continuity of Services

### AccelerateCT

In a document developed by the CSDE - [AccelerateCT](#) - educators and leaders are encouraged to develop plans to return to school in 2021-22 that will "...promote renewal, reduce opportunity gaps, accelerate learning, and advance equity." AccelerateCT defines high impact practices each district should consider as they plan for the future:

- High-quality instruction with integrated digital tools and resources
- Multi-tiered system of instructional and behavioral supports
- Formative assessment process and progress monitoring
- Multiple means of demonstrating and assessing learning
- Multiple means of accessing learning
- Developing student agency
- Cultivating strong and supportive relationships with students and families

### Newtown's District Strategic Plan

While safety is priority, our goals include supporting students academically, socially and emotionally in alignment with the beliefs, values, and expectations outlined in our District Strategic Plan. The high impact practices outlined by the State of Connecticut align well with the mission in Newtown's District Strategic Plan, which calls upon "a partnership of students, families, educators and community to **INSPIRE EACH STUDENT TO EXCEL** in attaining and applying the knowledge, skills and attributes that lead to personal success while becoming a contributing member of a dynamic global community."



Several key objectives in our current District Strategic Plan will continue to guide our collective efforts to improve, reimagine, and support the quality of educational services we provide our students:

**Objective I:** Each student will develop and consistently demonstrate college, career, and global readiness skills in...

- problem-solving,
- critical and creative thinking,
- collaboration, and
- written and verbal communication.

**Objective II:** Each student will develop and demonstrate necessary character attributes for personal well-being and to become contributing members of the local and global communities. These attributes include...

- social emotional wellness,
- positive behaviors,
- respect for diversity, and
- responsible digital citizenship.

**Objective III:** Each student will set and achieve personally challenging goals and demonstrate their learning through multiple modes in addition to formative and summative assessments of learning.

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### Student Assessment

Assessing student learning will be critical in the year ahead, especially as our efforts will be focused on supporting student learning and growth following a pandemic. In order to gauge what specific student deficits or gaps might exist for each learner, our educators and leaders will need to access data with immediacy and efficiency. Newtown Public Schools invested in **EduCLIMBER**, which combines a comprehensive assessment system and a real-time dashboard for educators. Our teacher leaders are in the process of being trained so they can support staff in the fall of 2021 to access student assessment data in order to make informed decisions about the supports that will address their academic and social-emotional needs.

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### Academic Programs and Pathways

Following the pandemic, Newtown Public Schools will provide a continuity of services, as well as implementing new and innovative programs and digital resources to support, enrich, and accelerate student learning. Students will continue to have multiple means of accessing learning and presenting their understandings. **Student choice and voice** will remain integral as we revise curriculum and plan for innovative instruction to engage learners. Through the Assistant Superintendent's office, a student advisory council will help in reviewing curricular changes that support a multicultural view. Student agency is a priority and will allow for **meaningful, relevant, and engaging resources** to promote conceptual understanding and transfer of learning.

The collective efforts of staff, leaders, and members of the community will have a positive influence on the quality of Newton's educational system in the years ahead. While the natural inclination might be to focus solely on learning loss caused by the pandemic, a greater opportunity exists to capitalize on the valuable qualities that currently exist in our school community and work creatively to **inspire, nurture, support, and accelerate learning across all grade levels.**

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## **New K-5 Math Program**

The inclusion of a **new K-5 math program** in the coming year, which includes a greater foundation for problem solving and digital resources, will more effectively address struggling math learners. After a review of NWEA and other data, math was the area that showed a more significant deficit over the last year due to school closure. Over the course of the 2020-21 school year, several math programs were piloted to improve math instruction for our students, not only as a result of COVID and interruptions to learning, but to address struggling learners who will benefit from a more engaging, hand-on program that supports problem-solving and critical thinking skills.

The **Bridges** program was selected and will be implemented in the fall of 2021. In addition to our new math program, we are also including additional math interventionists at each of our elementary schools to support math learners who might need more focused attention on math skills and concepts. Similarly, a pilot will begin for a new math program at the 6-8 level that will provide a consistent transition to support learners as they move to middle school.

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## **Blended Learning**

As AccelerateCT clearly defines, high-quality instruction with integrated digital tools and resources is important for advancing learning. Although we know that in-person learning is the most effective model, we also firmly believe that students' interactions with online resources are engaging and beneficial for learning. Blended learning combines digital resources and opportunities for online learning with in-person instruction. During the pandemic, we worked to ensure that all students had access to technology (Chromebooks) and purchased resources for digital learning that would support classroom instruction, such as IXL, Rosetta Stone, Ed Puzzle, Newsela, and Everyday Speech.

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## **Multi-Tiered Systems of Support**

The inclusion of staff to provide deliberate, ongoing tiered support through the Scientific Research-based Intervention (SRBI) process will help to address learning loss due to COVID. Through formative and summative assessments of student learning, students with deficits will be identified and provided deliberate, frequent assistance and progress monitoring. SRBI teams exist at each building to review data, identify students and provide Multi-tiered Systems of Support (MTSS). These systems of support include added assistance in the classroom setting, small group instruction, and/or individualized attention to meet their unique academic needs.

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## **Social-Emotional Learning**

The landscape of teaching and learning has changed following school closure and the impact that had on our students. While we anticipate students returning in the fall with both learning and social-emotional challenges, staff and leaders in Newtown Public Schools are well-prepared to support their needs. Students who exhibit emotional concerns will be identified and receive appropriate services. While much of this is a natural part of our existing approaches to support our students, the inclusion of additional support service staff for the 2021-22 school year will allow for individualized, meaningful, and appropriate mental health services for our students.

Our **social-emotional learning (SEL) programs**, based on the tenets of [CASEL](#). All schools continue to model mindfulness at each school. Mindfulness rooms are set up at the elementary level to create calming spaces that help students deal with emotions that negatively interfere with learning.

Behavioral Interventionists (trained paraprofessionals) are in place at all our elementary schools. These paras work with students who exhibit challenging behaviors in the classroom. Our Second Step program in K-8 will continue and is evidence-based to promote social and emotional growth. Students learn to confront conflicts, deal with social-emotional issues, employ strategies to reduce stress, show respect for others, and develop skills for their health and wellness. Programs in 7-12 include advisory periods and Project Adventure as a means of facilitating students' growth in problem-solving, dealing with emotional concerns, peer relationships, collaboration and leadership.

Members of PEAC (Parent Educator Advisory Council) in the *Partnerships* subgroup developed an after-school social-emotional program for students at the elementary level. This was piloted during the pandemic and facilitated by paraprofessionals. Elementary students had an opportunity to meet with their peers virtually from across the district to enjoy online games and activities to mitigate isolation and help students meet new friends. This program was so successful that it will be continued as an "in-person" program after school during the 2021-22 school year.

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## **Mental Health**

Newtown's SOS (signs of suicide) program will continue to help identify at-risk students, along with student behaviors identified through counselors and staff. We have acquired funding for a **Kids in Crisis** counselor at our middle school to support at-risk students during school and through a 24-hour hotline/facility. The *Kids in Crisis* program is currently in place at the high school and will now be extended down for our younger adolescents as we anticipate increased issues with depression, anxiety, and suicidal ideations - some of which may be an outcome of the pandemic.



The inclusion of our **Hope Squad** program next year at the high school will provide a peer-to-peer suicide prevention program. Students are trained by an advisor to be aware of their peers and watch for warning signs of suicide. Stated in the core values of Hope Squad, "Students learn to show empathy toward their peers, listen without judgment, and reduce the stigma regarding help-seeking and mental illness."

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### **Staff Wellness**

Staff wellness is equally important to us. We encourage staff health and wellness, which includes professional development activities and mental health resources. During a professional development day in April of 2021, the afternoon was deliberately designed for K-12 staff to engage in healthy, stress-reducing activities to support their mental health and well being. Our Employee Assistance Program (EAP) will continue to support all employees who might need outside support for a variety of mental health needs.

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### **Meeting the Needs of Special Education and ESL Students**

The inclusion of a **new co-teaching model** at the middle school will provide greater support for students during classroom instruction. Currently, the co-teaching model only exists at the high school level. In light of increased academic needs for students with disabilities, the need for support before, during, and following direct instruction is critical. Many students have been on remote learning, and others have had modified services as a result. This will help address learning gaps that are now more prevalent.

Additional special education services have been added, including social workers, teachers, and school psychologists in areas where we have identified growing needs as a result of the pandemic. For example, we have added an additional teacher at Middle Gate Elementary and increased social worker services at Reed Intermediate.

We have also included an additional teacher for our district **ESL program** to support students with language needs. Not only is this a growing population, but our ESL students will need further attention and support as a result of the pandemic. Adequate staffing will allow more individualized attention for students K-12, and the addition of resources such as Rosetta Stone will serve to support English language learners in the future.



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### **Coordinator of Equity and Inclusion**

Through private funding, Newtown Public Schools is in the process of hiring a qualified individual to work with staff, students, and families in the ongoing refinement and maintenance of safe, respectful, and inclusive learning environments across the district. In April, a bullying survey for staff, students, and families was sent out as a part of field research conducted by members of John Jay College and Newtown Public Schools. Following that survey, a similar survey for elementary staff and families was developed to provide a clear and comprehensive picture of issues impacting the climate and culture of our schools. Using this data, as well as previous information and stories shared by families, students, and alumni, Newtown Public Schools determined that a priority was ensuring all students felt a sense of belonging and safety as valued members of our school community.

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### **Parent Communication and Partnerships**

Throughout the last 18 months, our goal has been to communicate frequently with parents and caregivers. During the pandemic, and as we moved between learning models (in-person, hybrid, and remote), it was important for parents to remain connected to staff and leaders as their partnership in helping with remote learning at home was key to student success. Through PEAC (Parent Educator Advisory Council), staff and parents in the Branding & Communication subgroup began to explore more effective and efficient platforms. In the fall of 2021, the district will launch **Blackboard**, which will replace our current system through School Messenger. Using an app, parents and staff will have access to all current school information, websites, and communication tools using their phone or other devices.

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### **III. Public Comment**

Stakeholder feedback is important to Newtown Public School staff, leadership, and Board of Education members. From the inception of the Re-Entry Plan developed for the 2020-21 school year, parents and community members have been given ample opportunities to voice their opinions, provide perspectives, and offer feedback. We continue to utilize Board of Education meetings as a conduit to the general public, but also provide other opportunities for stakeholders to share input.

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A recent open-ended survey (in May) was sent to all stakeholders to receive comments regarding our return to school in the 2021-22 school year. Responses included themes around in-person learning, health metrics, safety, and mitigation strategies such as masks.



Additionally, the Superintendent of Schools meets with groups of parents in Google Meets and Zoom meetings to discuss and offer clarity around COVID health and safety measures, academic, social/emotional learning, or potential changes anticipated for the upcoming 2021-22 school year. PTA President meetings, PEAC (Parent Educator Advisory Council). NFT Union meetings, Teacher Forums and Culture and Climate meetings will continue to provide opportunities to engage stakeholders and allow for open discussion and public comment.

Summaries of committee and BOE meeting notes, as well as survey input, will be posted on the Newtown Public Schools district website to provide transparency and clarity.

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#### **IV. Periodic Review Process**

Districts are required to periodically review and, as appropriate, revise their Safe Return to In-Person Instruction and Continuity of Services Plan at least every six months through September 30, 2023. Each review must include seeking public comment on the plan and developing the plan after taking into account the public comment.

Below are the dates that districts must submit a refreshed or updated plan to the Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) via eGMS. The review dates are as follows:

- June 23, 2021
- December 23, 2021
- June 23, 2022
- December 23, 2022



## **V. Understandable and Uniform Format**

Newtown Public Schools will utilize the current template and make it accessible to the public. The plan will be posted and accommodations made for those who require formats related to language or disabilities. Our plan will be to continue to revise our plan as health metrics, State mandates, and guidance evolves. Thus, we expect aspects of our plan to be revised even prior to the above dates, and will consider not only State guidance but community input as well.