



The Public Schools of Brookline
Town Hall
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V. James Marini, Ph. D.
Interim Superintendent

December 23, 2020

Dear Colleagues,

I am very pleased to announce that last Thursday night the Town of Brookline approved our request for emergency funds to support COVID-19 testing in 2021.

I want you to know how grateful we are for your continued dedication and commitment to your students in these uncertain times. Your health and safety is a priority. While all of the details are still being worked out, and more details can be found below, here is what I can tell you about the new program at this point:

- In January, the PSB will begin offering a new weekly asymptomatic testing program.
- The program is expected to be 8-10 weeks long.
- We are offering this program at no cost to all PSB staff who regularly interact with students, full time and part time.
- This program is completely voluntary. If you must pause your participation or join after the opening date, that can be arranged with advance notice, although consistent participation is best and important for monitoring health in our buildings.
- The test is a self-administered nasal swab that will then be collected at your PSB building. Complete and specific instructions will be sent in January. There are many different approaches to swabbing and collection that our peer districts are using. So for the first few weeks we will all need to be flexible and experiment with different processes to determine what works best for us in Brookline.
- You will typically receive your results within 24 hours to an email address you provide.
- If you develop COVID symptoms or are identified as a close contact, please do what you do now (seek immediate guidance from your healthcare provider, and as needed, get yourself tested and/or quarantine). This new program does not replace our current procedure for individuals with symptoms or who have been identified as close contacts.

Even though our PSB in-school transmission numbers have not been a concern to date, we are introducing this program in January because COVID cases have risen to a level in Massachusetts that are concerning statewide. We wanted to provide this extra layer of protection for you as we all wait to hear about a timeline for a vaccine rollout for the public schools. This testing is one more part of many investments in health and safety that began in June and ramped up in August/September. Our staff colleagues and volunteers have worked very hard and have improved our ventilation and HVAC systems, provided personal protective equipment for our staff, increased disinfecting and cleaning of our buildings, created procedures for distancing and cohorts, provided an in-town testing option especially for symptomatic individuals and close contacts, and many other safety precautions.

I wanted to get this information to you as we begin the winter recess, and I will provide more complete information in January. Some additional background information can also be found below.

Sincerely,
Jim

Additional details about the planned testing program:

I would particularly like to thank those who worked so hard to make this happen for us. This effort has been spearheaded by Tricia Laham, Coordinator of School Health Services, and I am grateful to our entire nursing team who will help administer this program. I am also grateful to Dr. Swannie Jett, Commissioner of Public Health and his staff; Mel Kleckner, Town Administrator and Justin Casanova-Davis, Assistant Town Administrator; and our team of four parent volunteers: Grady Clouse, Dr. Nira Pollock, Dr. Jenny Tam, and School Committee member Susan Wolf Ditkoff. Without their tireless efforts over weeks, nights, and weekends, we would not be able to offer this program.

On Thursday, December 17, the Brookline Advisory Committee approved \$500,000 of emergency funds for COVID-19 testing in 2021. \$300,000 of those funds are dedicated to a new weekly voluntary asymptomatic testing program for all of our student-facing Public Schools of Brookline educators and staff. Funds will also support some surveillance testing for middle and high school students in our hybrid learning program, grades 6-12. Student-facing staff were identified as the top priority for testing with older students as a secondary priority; it was not recommended that younger students be routinely tested. The other \$200,000 is dedicated to continuing the Town testing site (currently run by mPathy, primarily for symptomatic and close contact cases). Any uninsured members of the Brookline community who have symptoms or are identified as close contacts will have their costs covered by the Town (this does not apply to people without symptoms). These funds are expected to last for the first 2-3 months of 2021.

We hope that providing this voluntary testing program for student-facing staff will provide reassurance to our PSB staff and provide data that will allow PSB to confirm the effectiveness of our COVID-19 mitigation practices and evaluate any additional measures that may be needed. Real-time, system-wide information will also help provide specific action steps and peace of mind for our entire school community.