

Dear Parents, Caregivers, Guardians and Staff,

Thank you for your continued partnership for the education, health and safety of our Weston Public School community. On February 23rd, the District's plan to transition from a hybrid model to a more comprehensive "all in" learning model was presented. Within this model were proposed changes including a transition to a 5-day-per-week model of instruction at the secondary level and a transition from weekly PCR testing to weekly pooled testing, including mandated weekly testing of athletes and musicians. These changes to the in-school instructional model will allow Weston Public Schools to provide a more robust level of education that is reflective of the current Covid-19 environment. This letter provides detailed information about the testing process moving forward which includes augmenting our district-wide testing program with pooled testing. **PLEASE READ THIS DOCUMENT IN ITS ENTIRETY.**

### **Executive Summary:**

We are excited to increase the amount of in-person learning time and are making the needed adjustments to our testing procedures to accommodate these changes. Here is what you need to know:

- We are implementing weekly pooled testing for all students and staff, in-school, during the school day.
- Effective March 31st, weekly asymptomatic PCR testing of students and families is discontinued and replaced with a program that includes pooled testing of students and staff only.
- Pooled (5 to 10 students) test results are reported to the school nurse, not the family.
- A positive pool result triggers an immediate round of tests for that pool of students. A **negative** second test (15 minute antigen using the Abbot BinaxNow) places the student(s) back in class. A student/staff member with a **positive** second test will be dismissed home immediately and the positive results of the individual will be provided to local public health for isolation and contact tracing/quarantine of close contacts.
- Testing is mandated for participation in athletics and music programs at both the Middle and High Schools. Participation is strongly recommended for all students, faculty and staff at all Weston Public Schools.
- All other risk mitigation measures and COVID-19 safety protocols remain in place including mandatory mask-wearing.

### **Weston Public Schools Response to COVID-19:**

Our school leaders and staff continue to work diligently to ensure successful execution of the recommended safety measures, including:

- Signs to direct staff and students,
- Mandatory mask-wearing,
- Physical distancing of 6 feet whenever possible,
- Hand washing/sanitization,
- Daily symptom checks,
- Daily and weekly sanitizing of the schools and frequently touched surfaces,

- Air filtration, increased attention to air exchange and increasing fresh air,
- Weekly testing of students and staff.

We continue our collaboration with the [Weston Board of Health](#), including review of safety practices, identification and notification of positive cases and close contacts, and support for students and staff who are in isolation and quarantine.

Adherence to these measures has allowed us to remain open to date, and recommend expansion to the current proposed model for increased in-person learning. While vaccination rates are slowly improving, we are still months away from vaccination of the majority of students. Continued adherence to these mitigation strategies, including pooled testing, will most likely continue into the 2021-2022 school year.

The reason we strongly encourage everyone in our community to participate in testing for COVID-19 is to allow for early identification of positive cases. On January 12th we began our weekly assurance testing of students and staff. To date we have conducted a total of 4,486 tests and identified 3 positive individuals. Positive individuals were quickly put into isolation and their close contacts were quarantined. We were able to stop the spread of COVID-19 through this process! Testing combined with our robust contact tracing program in Weston works! In efforts to maintain a strong testing platform that will be sustainable and fiscally responsible through the end of the 2020-2021 school year, we will be transitioning from weekly individual testing to weekly pooled testing.

#### **Changes to our testing platform will include:**

1) For Staff: Weekly, pre-scheduled **asymptomatic PCR testing** (for staff who have no known symptoms of COVID-19). This, in combination with weekly pooled testing will provide for more specific data which more closely monitors the current COVID-19 trends within Weston Public Schools.

2) For Staff and Students: Testing of **symptomatic individuals using the Abbott BinaxNOW antigen tests** for students and staff who develop *symptoms* of COVID-19 while in school.

3) For Staff and Students: Scheduled, weekly, **asymptomatic PCR pooled testing** for students and staff (for students and staff who have no known symptoms of or exposure to a known-positive COVID-19 person). Unlike the current weekly PCR testing model, the weekly pooled testing model will occur during school hours at predetermined times by school/district staff.

4) For Athletes and Musicians: Mandated, weekly **asymptomatic PCR pooled testing**. Information about the process will be sent by the Athletic Director, Michael McGrath, and Music Director, Chris Memoli, within the next few days. Due to either the increased risk or possible increased incidence of close contact with others garnered by athletes or musicians the School Committee is requiring participation in testing by these individuals.

This multi-tiered approach will enable us to provide weekly assurance to students, families, and staff, follow COVID-19 trends within each building, along with early identification and isolation of those who are COVID-19 positive and/or those who develop symptoms while in school. We have successfully partnered with the state and the Broad Institute through our

vendor partner Project Beacon, to offer these additional safety measures to all students and staff. **We plan to begin pooled testing the week of March 15th.**

*\*\*Weekly individual PCR testing will remain open until March 31st under the current model so there will be overlap in the programs.\*\**

**We strongly encourage all Staff and Students to participate in the COVID-19 testing program provided by the Weston Public Schools.** Over the next week you will be receiving an email invitation with organizational codes needed to register for our testing platforms from Project Beacon. You must register/provide consent for yourself/minor student(s) to participate. The process for registration can be reviewed [here](#). During the registration process you will be asked to complete a consent document. This consent serves two purposes; first, it serves as a consent for testing, which gives the school permission to test you or your student. Second, it serves as a consent to report results to the Massachusetts Department of Public Health and to the Board of Health in Weston and where you/your student lives. As COVID-19 is a reportable disease as mandated by the state of Massachusetts, to access testing, you must agree to the reporting of results. The reporting process is completed automatically through the Project Beacon platform once consent is obtained. The entire registration and consent process takes 2-3 minutes, is available to anyone 18 years of age or older without a designated parent or guardian, and once registered, the user/parent/guardian is able to use this platform for testing at school and at any of the Project Beacon testing sites (Stop-the-Spread) throughout the state, listed [here](#).

### **Pooled PCR Testing:**

Unlike individual PCR testing, which is diagnostic in nature and provides a moment-in-time glimpse into an individual's COVID-19 infection status, pooled testing is a *surveillance* tool whereby a grouping of 5 or more individuals are collectively screened for COVID-19 at any moment-in-time. This is where the financial benefit is realized, by screening up to 10 individuals the cost of the test drops dramatically from \$29 per test to \$3 per test. Ultimately creating a more sustainable platform for continued use, while still allowing for early identification and quarantine of COVID-positive individuals. This [article](#) from the Boston Globe may be a helpful resource to understand how pooled testing works and why schools in Massachusetts are making the change to this surveillance testing model.

### ***Registration Process:***

Weston Public Schools was paired with a state assigned vendor - Project Beacon. The platform is the same as the one we presently use. For those new to the testing platform, information for registration and about the site can be found [here](#). For those who are currently enrolled in the platform, additional (pooled testing) profiles for each student/staff MUST be made prior to accessing testing. Registration information, including organizational codes, for students and staff will be sent in a separate notification.

### ***Testing Process:***

Students and staff who opt into this program will have the ability to test weekly during the school day. The sampling technique remains the same, a cotton swab rotated

around the lower aspect of each nostril. A video demonstration can be seen [here](#). Students in grades 2-12 and staff are able to self swab if they so choose.

Students and staff will be directed to the sampling area at predetermined times. Additional information about sampling times and days will be distributed once the total number of participants per building is determined. The average sampling time is less than 5 seconds from the time of arrival to the testing area.

### ***Sampling Analysis:***

Swabs will be collected (pooled) in groups of 10. Meaning all 10 swabs will be run together. Unlike the current individual PCR testing program where your individually sampled swab is placed in a collection tube that is assigned specifically to you, 10 individually collected swabs are placed into one collection tube. All completed samples are transported to the lab and analyzed together. As with the current testing program, results will be received within 24-48 hours; however, the results of each pool will be sent to the school and not to your individual accounts.

### ***Negative Pool-***

The school will be notified of the negative pool results. Parents/Staff will not be notified of the weekly result unless the result is positive. Students/Staff will be sampled again the following week and will not have to schedule weekly pooled testing once you/your student is signed up/consented for participation.

### ***Positive Pool in School-***

The school will be notified of any positive pool results. The individuals within a positive pool will be brought to the medical waiting area and a rapid antigen test (Abbott BinaxNOW) test will be performed. Those students who result negative will be returned to class. Those students who result positive will be sent home to begin isolation. In addition, contact tracing of the positive student will commence and close contacts will be dismissed from school to begin quarantine. The Weston Board of Health will work with any/all positive individuals and their close contacts to stop the spread of Coronavirus.

***\*\*Please note isolation and quarantine guidance has not changed. Any individual (staff or student) who has tested positive or has been identified as a close contact (being within 6 feet of a COVID-19 positive individual for a cumulative total of 15 minutes over 24 hours, masked or unmasked, inside our outside beginning two days before symptom onset or positive test date for asymptomatic individuals.) MUST leave school as soon as possible and follow public health required isolation/quarantine requirements.\*\****

### ***Positive Pool out of School-***

The school will be notified of any positive pool results. The individuals within the positive pool will be notified, and ***MUST REMAIN HOME*** pending further instruction from the school nurse. If the notification occurs during a weekday, staff/students can be driven to the school and retested, at a time designated by the school nurse, using the process described above. If the notification occurs during a weekend, individuals identified in the positive pool will be asked to have PCR testing conducted at one of the Project Beacon state

sites listed [here](#). PROOF OF RESULT MUST BE SENT TO THE BUILDING-BASED SCHOOL NURSE, OR THE DIRECTOR OF HEALTH SERVICES PRIOR TO MONDAY OF THE FOLLOWING WEEK. ***Students/Staff are not cleared to return to school until notified as such by the building-based school nurse or the Director of Health Services.***

### **Weekly Asymptomatic PCR Testing:**

As of April 1st, weekly asymptomatic PCR testing will be available to staff only. Testing will be building-based and at times designated by your building-based school nurse. Additional information including testing codes and testing times will be distributed within the next few days.

As previously stated, ALL (student/staff/family) individual PCR testing appointments will be honored through the end of March using the current process. Please contact your building-based school nurse or the Director of Health Services with any questions or concerns you may have. *After March 31st, students/parents/guardians will NOT be able to test weekly via individual PCR method at the schools. **If you have been using PCR testing through the school program to travel, you will need to make alternative arrangements going forward to meet any travel orders.*** The Weston Public Schools travel guidance can be found [here](#).

### **Symptomatic Antigen Testing:**

Students or staff who develop COVID-19 like symptoms while in school will be directed to the nurse for assessment and testing using the Abbott BinaxNOW rapid antigen test. This rapid test has been provided by the Massachusetts Department of Public Health and is approved by the FDA to identify the presence of COVID-19 in symptomatic individuals in a sample resulting within 15 minutes. ***REGARDLESS OF TEST RESULT, ALL STUDENTS AND STAFF WHO DISPLAY COVID-19 SYMPTOMS IN SCHOOL WILL BE DISMISSED HOME.***

If a result is negative, the individual must still be dismissed home, using current COVID-19 dismissal procedures, and can return to school once the symptoms have resolved and they have been cleared by their Primary Care provider or a negative PCR/molecular COVID-19 test. If you have chosen to also participate in the Project Beacon testing option as discussed previously in this document, the school nurse will obtain a PCR sample in addition to the negative BinaxNOW sample. Results of this second sample will be available in 24-48 hours, and if negative can be used to return to in-person learning once symptoms have resolved.

If the result is positive, the individual MUST be dismissed home and begin isolation as soon as possible using current COVID-19 dismissal procedures.

### **Other Testing Scenarios:**

In some instances, your Board of Health or primary care provider may ask you to seek Coronavirus testing. **YOU MAY NOT USE THE SCHOOL TESTING SITES TO COMPLETE THIS TESTING.** You must seek testing at one of the state provided testing sites listed [here](#). Testing of symptomatic individuals puts school staff, including the nurse, at risk of contracting the virus, and should only be conducted when medically necessary. Please do your part and remain home if you develop symptoms and follow the [current procedures](#) for return to school.

## **Reporting of Results:**

Results of all testing (whether antigen or PCR-type, resulting positive or negative, with the exception of the initial pooled results) are reported to the Department of Public Health and to the Local Board of Health (including the Weston Board of Health), and once reported, the Local Board of Health will provide support with the following for individuals with positive test results:

- Isolation at home for at least 10 days **and** until at least 24 hours have passed with no fever and improvement in other symptoms
- Ongoing symptom evaluation
- Contact tracing and quarantine of close contacts (both in and outside of the Weston Public Schools)
- Encouraging you to connect with your physician and personal close contacts
- Return to school/work guidance

Any students or staff who were possible close contacts of a positive individual will be notified and dismissed home. The Board of Health will follow up to verify close contact status and provide quarantine information.

***\*\*Please note, with proximity changes proposed in the “all in” learning model there is a potential for more students to be identified as close contacts of a positive student and required to quarantine. A close contact is defined as being within 6 feet of a COVID-19 positive individual for a cumulative total of 15 minutes over 24 hours, masked or unmasked, inside our outside beginning two days before symptom onset or positive test date for asymptomatic individuals.\*\****

## **What Testing Is:**

Testing is a glimpse-in-time or snapshot, and represents the individual's COVID-19 status (or *potential* status in the case of pooled groups) only at the moment the sample is taken. Testing provides an additional tool in our mitigation toolbox and the opportunity to gain a better understanding of the movement of COVID-19 within Weston and beyond. To date we have not seen in-school spread of COVID-19. The more staff/students that participate in our weekly testing program the more we will know about the Coronavirus-status of our community. Testing, like mask wearing, distancing, hand washing and staying home when sick is a choice each of us can make to protect ourselves and the greater community. Please do your part to help all of us move closer to the end of this pandemic.

## **What Testing Is Not:**

It is NOT a safety pass. It does not confer safety, nor does it reduce risk when engaging in social activities. It is NOT permission to travel or engage in other high-risk activities.

## **Our Tools to Combat the Coronavirus Pandemic:**

Our current tools to Stop the Spread of COVID-19 are:

- Masking
- Hand washing
- Social distancing
- Avoiding social gatherings and delaying travel
- Staying home if feeling unwell
- Sanitization
- Testing and
- [Vaccination](#) as it becomes available

The Weston Public Schools remain committed to fostering all these choices in partnership with The Weston Board of Health.

While we are pleased to offer you this free, new alternative, we ask that you continue to remain vigilant and dedicated to use of the current mitigation methods to keep our schools open. Please contact Jamy Gaynor, Director of Health Services at [gaynorj@weston.org](mailto:gaynorj@weston.org), your building-based nurse or your principal with any questions or concerns you may have. Public health questions can be directed to Michele Schuckel, COVID-19 Response Manager for the Town of Weston at [Schuckel.m@WestonMA.gov](mailto:Schuckel.m@WestonMA.gov).

Thank you for partnering with us.

Midge Connolly, PhD, MEd, BA  
Superintendent of Schools

Jamy Gaynor, EdD, MS, RN, NCSN  
Director of Health Services

Michele Fronk Schuckel, MBA, BSN, RN  
COVID-19 Response Manager, Public Health Nurse  
Town of Weston, Board of Health