

FAQ about The Birches Academy's 2021-22 reopening plan

(updated: February 17)

Will masks be required all year? In its August 24 meeting, the Board of Trustees voted to review the plan in each monthly meeting. The Board members' votes did not change in the meetings on September 21, October 12, November 9 or January 11. (The Board did not vote in the December meeting as all members could not be present.) In the February 15 meeting, the Board reviewed the 2021-22 reopening plan and voted 6-1 to remove the provision requiring masks. Starting February 21, masks will be optional for all students and staff. Details are in an addendum to the reopening plan, [found here](#).

Can we delay the mask optional policy to start after February break? The Board discussed delaying the policy change until March 7 but ultimately voted to make the effective date February 21.

Will students sometimes be required to wear masks? The addendum to the reopening plan provides reasons masks will be required:

- Riding the school bus (field trips included)
- There are 2 or more related cases in one classroom (a *cluster*); that classroom will mask for 10 school days.
- There are 2 or more *clusters* in the school (an *outbreak*); the entire school will mask for 10 school days.
- A student returns to school after testing positive for COVID-19 and are on days 6-10 post positive test

Additionally, we will continue to follow the [state recommendations](#) for masking for close household members regardless of vaccination status.

When can my symptomatic student return to school?

- **Option 1: Following a negative COVID-19 test result**

Students required to isolate due to symptoms can return to school following a negative rapid or PCR COVID-19 test result, they have been fever-free for 24 hours (without medication), and their symptoms have *improved*. See description below for submitting a negative result from a home testing kit. Contact your school nurse to provide test results and identify your student's return date.

- **Option 2: Following 5 days of isolation**

If you do not wish to have your student tested for COVID-19, your student must isolate for 5 days unless they receive an alternative medical diagnosis by a doctor. In order to return to school after this period, parents will need to contact the school on day 5 to confirm the student has been fever-free without medications for 24 hours and the

original symptoms, if any, have improved. Upon returning to school, students will be required to wear a mask full time for an additional 5 calendar days. Please contact your school prior to returning for more information.

- **Option 3: Following 10 Days of Isolation**

Students unable or unwilling to wear a well-fitting mask full time at school for the 5 day period can return to school after 10 days.

- **Option 4: Following a doctor's note indicating an alternative diagnosis**

Students required to isolate due to symptoms can return to school if their physician provides an alternative diagnosis to explain the symptoms, they have been fever-free for 24 hours (without medication), and their symptoms have improved. Contact your school nurse to provide a doctor's note and determine your student's return date.

If students are absent due to quarantining or illness, how will they keep up if there is no remote learning option? If a student is going to be absent for more than a day or two we will work with families to make sure the students have help with any missing assignments as well as get them back up to speed.

How do you make decisions about students and staff who test positive or are exposed? We follow the chart provided on page 9 in the [State of NH COVID-19 toolkit](#).

What do you do when there is a positive case in a classroom? Once we are notified of a positive case we reach out to everyone in the class to let them know. Because only close household contacts need to quarantine, asymptomatic students are allowed to return to school. We ask that families monitor for symptoms and test as necessary. We also notify the school community in a weekly email covering total infections reported in the school for that week.

My child's class had a case of strep throat. Why are we not informed of that but we are of COVID? If a classroom reports more than one case of a communicable illness like strep, or something like an outbreak of lice, we do take steps to inform the families in that class.

Will the SASS testing continue? Yes! SASS (Safer at School Surveillance COVID 19 testing program) is a NH Public Health Initiative that offers free, in school, voluntary testing to students and staff. We have no current plans to end the program and welcome new signups by [using this link](#).