

Supplemental Guidance for Student Groups and School Events for School Year 2020-2021

Initially Released August 31, 2020, Revised April 1, 2021

Introduction

As a supplement to DESE's [Guidance for Courses Requiring Additional Safety Considerations During School Year 2020-2021](#) (*download*) and the Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs' [Youth and Adult Amateur Sport Activities Guidance](#) (*download*), we are providing districts and schools with guidance for student groups that involve mixing of cohorts and school events that may require additional safety considerations.

Student activities provide important opportunities to develop leadership and teamwork skills, engage in new experiences, and serve their community. We strongly encourage schools and districts to continue providing these opportunities to students. **Adaptations to these activities, however, are necessary to support the safety of students and staff.**

Specifically, this guidance covers:

- **Student activities before and after school**
 - **Non-athletic student groups**
 - **Non-athletic interschool competitions**
 - **Volunteering**
 - **Prom**
- **Gatherings with outside participants**
- **Leaving school grounds**

This guidance may be revised as we continue to monitor COVID-19 trends and the latest medical research. Districts and schools should also reference the extensive DESE reopening guidance for more information on core health and safety practices that schools must adopt.

Specific guidance by type of activity

Non-athletic student groups

Non-athletic student group meetings are likely to involve increased mixing between student cohorts. This may be more relevant for elementary students, who likely will have stricter cohorts. **Whenever feasible and to the maximum extent possible, these meetings should be held virtually.**

For in-person meetings, we recommend the following guidelines:

- Group meetings should be supervised by staff and must abide by DESE's core health and safety guidelines (including masks, physical distance, frequent handwashing).

- Groups that work collaboratively (e.g., student newspaper, yearbook) should abide by the shared equipment guidance previously released in the [Guidance for Courses Requiring Additional Safety Considerations During School Year 2020-2021](#) (*download*).
- Group sizes should be reduced and work organized into cohorts to the extent feasible.

Non-athletic interschool competitions

Whenever feasible and to the maximum extent possible, interschool competitions should be held virtually. There are online resources to support these virtual interactions.¹ In-person interschool competitions are permitted if at least 6 feet of distance can be maintained between individuals and participants and attendees wear masks at all times.

- If an interschool competition is held in person, it must abide by the guidelines below for large gatherings and leaving school grounds.
- To the maximum extent feasible, interschool competitions should:
 - Not share equipment
 - Be held outdoors, if possible
 - Shorten events or reduce participants
 - Incorporate protective equipment in a safe manner to further reduce spread of respiratory particles

Volunteering

- Any volunteer activities must abide by DESE’s core health and safety guidelines (including masks, physical distance, frequent handwashing).
- Consider volunteer activities that are outdoors and do not require person-to-person interaction (e.g., planting flowers in a park).
- Consider virtual volunteer service (e.g., younger student mentor program, pen pals).

Prom

Prom is an inherently high-risk activity, as it is a social gathering that involves dancing and singing (both of which are activities with increased respiration), and also presents concerning opportunities for students to break health and safety protocols in a relaxed environment.

Therefore, after consultation with our medical advisors, DESE strongly recommends that schools do not have proms and instead substitute alternative celebrations for seniors.

If schools do choose to hold proms, it is strongly recommended that they delay the prom until after the end of the school year, ideally delaying until such time when most students attending prom will have been vaccinated.

If schools do hold proms, they must follow this guidance document and applicable state guidance:

- Event Guidance:
<https://www.mass.gov/info-details/safety-standards-and-checklist-indoor-and-outdoor-events>

¹For instance, speech and debate virtual learning resources:
<https://www.speechanddebate.org/virtual-learning-resources/>

- Travel Advisory: <https://www.mass.gov/info-details/covid-19-travel-advisory>

General guidance for gatherings with outside participants or leaving school grounds

Gatherings of 10 or more that include outside participants

Whenever feasible and to the maximum extent possible, these gatherings should be moved online. Online events can be held where all participants are virtual, or where students and staff are in person, but audiences are virtual.

In-person gatherings (such as events and performances) should be discouraged and must abide by the following safety requirements. Only essential, student-centered events should be held in person, such as student group activities or interschool competitions.

Gatherings of 10 or more that include outside participants, such as in-person events, interschool competitions, and field trips, typically involve families and others outside of the school community, including people who may be in higher risk groups. As a result, it is important to put in place additional safety considerations.

- Whenever feasible and to the maximum extent possible, hold all events or competitions outdoors.
- Masks are required except when unsafe due to age, medical condition, or disability.
- All participants must maintain at least 6 feet of physical distance from every other participant in the gathering, aside from participants who are members of the same household. Additional physical distancing requirements for specific activities can be found in DESE's [Guidance for Courses Requiring Additional Safety Considerations During School Year 2020-2021](#).²
- Limit attendees to the extent feasible:
 - Indoor and outdoor gathering sizes should align with the statewide gathering order, [available here](#).
 - As of March 22, 2021, the indoor and outdoor gathering limits at event venues and public settings are:
 - Indoor gatherings are limited to 100 people indoors
 - Outdoor gatherings are limited to 150 people outdoors
- For outdoor performances involving singing or brass or wind instruments, and indoor performances involving brass or wind instruments, there must be at least 25 feet of distance between performers and the first row of the audience.³

² Physical distancing requirements for activities with additional safety considerations may be found [in the DESE Guidance for Courses Requiring Additional Safety Considerations for Fall 2020 \(download\)](#).

³ Commonwealth of Massachusetts, [Sector Specific Workplace Safety Standards for Theaters and Performance Venues to Address COVID-19](#). (2021, March).

- Indoor performances cannot include singing and must follow [state theater and performance venue guidelines](#).⁴
- Attendees should be informed in the weeks leading up to and including the day of the event, and at the entrance to the event, that they must not attend if they are feeling unwell or showing any symptoms of COVID-19.
- Consider scheduling multiple events, if needed, to allow for physical distancing.
- If the event is ticketed, tickets should be sold online in advance, if possible. Consider touchless payment for in-person ticket sales, and use handwashing before and after transactions.⁵
- Establish directional pathways to manage visitor flow for foot traffic in order to minimize contact (e.g., one-way entrance and exit to shows, one-way pathways). Post clearly visible signage regarding these policies.⁶
- Encourage the use of electronic versions or no-touch displays in place of commonly touched physical materials (such as programs or playbills) where possible. All commonly touched physical materials must be discarded or sanitized between use.⁷
- Ensure access to handwashing facilities on site, including soap and running water, wherever possible, and encourage frequent handwashing; alcohol-based hand sanitizers with at least 60 percent alcohol may be used as an alternative.⁸

Leaving school grounds

Schools are encouraged to consider virtual alternatives to leaving school grounds. The risk level of leaving school grounds depends on the type of activity and transportation for the trip. All trips leaving school grounds must comply with all health and safety guidance, including physical distancing, mask wearing, hand washing, and sanitation.

- If a school trip includes walking or a brief ride that abides by transportation guidelines, takes place where significant interaction with the public is not expected, and abides by the health and safety guidelines, it is permitted. For example, students may walk to a nearby park to observe plant and animal life during science class.
- If a school trip includes a long bus ride (more than two hours one way), results in close interaction with additional people (e.g., within 6 feet of outside chaperones or the public), or cannot abide by the health and safety guidelines, it is not permitted. Please note that bus transportation for a field trip may increase the number of close contacts, if there is a confirmed COVID-19 case.

⁴Commonwealth of Massachusetts, [Sector Specific Workplace Safety Standards for Theaters and Performance Venues to Address COVID-19](#). (2021, March).

⁵Commonwealth of Massachusetts, [Sector Specific Workplace Safety Standards for Theaters and Performance Venues to Address COVID-19](#). (2021, March).

⁶Commonwealth of Massachusetts, [Sector Specific Workplace Safety Standards for Theaters and Performance Venues to Address COVID-19](#). (2021, March).

⁷Commonwealth of Massachusetts, [Sector Specific Workplace Safety Standards for Theaters and Performance Venues to Address COVID-19](#). (2021, March).

⁸Commonwealth of Massachusetts, [Sector Specific Workplace Safety Standards for Theaters and Performance Venues to Address COVID-19](#). (2021, March).

- Field trips can pose an additional risk due to the need to travel offsite and the need for additional chaperones to ensure safety protocols are followed. Chaperones should be equipped with hand sanitizer and additional masks in the event the need arises for staff and students.
- The field trip venue must abide by [all state guidelines and safety protocols](#).
- Schools should communicate with families about any proposed field trips and make sure permission is received.
- Out of state travel is not recommended. If an out of state trip occurs, it must abide by the [state travel advisory](#).

Consider how to adjust open campus policies (i.e., when older students are permitted to leave school campus during the school day) to better support health and safety guidelines, such as ensuring students follow health and safety guidelines upon entering or re-entering school.