



Distance Learning Academy News

February 28, 2021

Dear Families,

We recognize that there is a lot of anxiety among the DLA community related to information released from DESE both about MCAS and increased in-person learning time. We are hoping to alleviate some of this by sharing what we know at this point.

MCAS - The state requires that all students enrolled in Massachusetts public schools take the state standardized test called MCAS. Because all DLA students are enrolled in the Newton Public Schools and the state has not provided an accommodation for tests to be taken outside of school buildings, we are planning for your student to take the assessment in person at their home school on the dates below. We know this may be cause for concern for you, and your student may not be comfortable attending in person. Principals are working on the logistics for the testing days so as to reduce anxiety and to ensure DLA students are welcomed safely and smoothly into the buildings. Please be assured that all safety measures, including masking and distancing, will be in place in the classrooms.

Families will receive an email from the district tomorrow with more information. It will include a link to a brief survey, asking for information that will help us plan for the testing.

English Language Arts	Grades 3, 4 and 5	Wed. April 7th
Science & Tech Engineering	Grade 5	Wed. April 28th
Mathematics	Grades 3, 4 and 5	Wed. May 12th

COVID-19 Testing

On Friday, the district shared information on the implementation of surveillance testing for students and staff attending school or working in-person in NPS school buildings. Some of you have inquired as to the availability of this same COVID testing for DLA students. Because of the specific testing program selected, this testing is only for students and staff attending or working in person in school buildings.

The testing program to be implemented uses a protocol called “pool testing.” Samples from students and staff who gather together in-person on a regular basis are grouped together and tested in batches. This “pool testing” provides a method by which to

identify asymptomatic cases that may be present in school buildings and to determine if in school transmission has occurred.

The pool testing methodology was selected specifically because it allows the district to analyze the results of a specific pool. This analysis then provides the district with the opportunity to contain potential outbreaks in school buildings should multiple individuals in a pool test positive. Because DLA students are not gathering together in person on a regular basis, the pool testing strategy would not be effective in identifying cases of transmission from person to person in a “pool,” or a specific group of people in a school building.

Increased In-Person Learning - Earlier this month, the district shared that it was developing plans to increase in-person learning time for students, with a focus on the elementary level. Increasing in-person learning, which will mean merging the cohorts currently attending in person, will require adjustments to both the school schedule and to some of the health and safety mitigation measures in place. Last week, DESE announced its desire to increase in-person learning time for students and indicated new guidelines would be issued shortly.

The district plans to continue to provide the Distance Learning Academy learning model to enrolled families for the remainder of this year. In remarks last week, DESE also indicated that the state will allow families to learn remotely through the end of the school year should they wish to do so. At this time, NPS is planning for DLA to continue in its current form through the end of this academic year. This means students will stay with their current DLA teacher. NPS has no intention of moving classroom teachers from remote to hybrid to accommodate the increase to in-person learning, nor does it plan to increase student to staff ratios in DLA.

As has been the case since the beginning of the year, transfers between models - hybrid to DLA or DLA to hybrid, are made on a space available basis. Movement between models is impacted by space available in classrooms, as well as student/teacher ratios in the distance learning environment.

More details on the changes to the learning models for elementary students will be shared over the next week, which will include a survey to better understand the interests of both hybrid and DLA families. Please know that we are simultaneously planning for increases to hybrid in-person learning, as well as considering impacts and improvements to the DLA model in these final few months of this school year.

Increased Learning Time in DLA - As changes are made for students learning in-person, we are considering comparable adjustments to schedules for students in DLA. District administrators are waiting on further guidance from DESE and will share information on how this impacts both learning models in the next few weeks. In the meantime, we have initiated an internal DLA Working Group of educators to ascertain where adjustments to schedules can be made to offer instructional time similar to hybrid.

We understand that so much unknown can be very unsettling for students, families and educators. We are working to incorporate any schedule adjustments in the least disruptive way possible while keeping student learning and well-being at the core of all decisions.

Please email any questions to DLAfamilysupport@newton.k12.ma.us. As always, we appreciate your partnership this year and will work together with you to navigate this next set of changes.

Warmly,
Jen, Jodie, Kristen and Maura

Important Dates:

- **Wednesday, 3/10** - [Kindergarten Information Night for NEW Families](#)
(PW=Kinder)
- **Tuesday, 3/16 and Wednesday, 3/17**- Schedule switch for Newton's Special Election. Tuesday will be a Wednesday schedule, and Wednesday will be a Tuesday schedule.
- **Wednesday, March 31st** - Spirit Day! Grade Two will choose our theme!
- **Monday, April 19th-Friday, April 23rd** - April Vacation

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