



COVID-19 Student and Staff Cohort Guidance

Last Revised: April 9, 2021

Purpose

DC Public Schools (DCPS) is committed to a safe and successful return to in-person learning for our students and staff. To this end, DCPS developed guidelines related to staff and student cohort parameters for in-person programming during the public health emergency. These guidelines have been developed and subsequently modified in consultation with DC Health to mitigate the spread of COVID-19.

An effective way to mitigate the spread of COVID-19 in schools is to group students and staff into cohorts - which are small groups of students and adults that stay together throughout the course of student learning. Cohorts can reduce the number of people exposed to COVID-19 if someone tests positive, meaning fewer students and staff would need to be at risk of infection and/or quarantined for 10 days.

Several aspects of cohorts have been modified from Term 3 guidance and are outlined below as schools begin Term 4 of School Year 2020- 2021.

Staff and Student Cohort Parameters

CLASSROOM COHORT SIZE/CLASSROOM CAPACITY

Recent data released by CDC has indicated that to allow more students back into school, there are times when 3 feet of social distancing can be implemented. This will be paired with other preventive strategies, such as mask use and cohorting to keep schools safe. If a school experiences substantial community spread, DCPS will consider modifying social distancing to 6 feet between students to address these concerns. Additionally, classroom capacity is no longer set at a specific number; rather, capacity should be limited to the maximum number of full-time occupants per instructional space that can be present while maintaining social distancing of 3 feet. While social distancing between students is 3 feet, a distance of 6 feet should be maintained between students and the teacher(s). Schools also should work to maximize space between students during meals and follow appropriate hygiene and cleaning practices as outlined in the DCPS COVID- 19 Operations Handbook. Additionally, a distance of 6 feet is to be maintained between student cohorts while entering/exiting the building, in hallways, and other shared spaces.

STUDENT COHORTS

The DC Health [guidelines updated March 2021](#) specify “Cohorts should have minimal to no interaction with other cohorts and remain distinct to the greatest extent possible, as mixing cohorts pose an avoidable increased risk of exposure if students test positive for COVID- 19.”

The following section provides key highlights related to cohort interactions for Term 4:

- o Student Cohorts:

- o In alignment with current guidance, secondary student classroom cohorts must be maintained and cannot be mixed during the term.
- o **NEW (Term 4):** Per DC Health, students participating in after-school outdoor athletics programming can have a separate, distinct cohort for athletics after-school programming.
- o **NEW (Term 4):** Elementary school students can participate in up to two cohorts (e.g. students at schools with an AM/PM schedule may have one cohort for their AM session and a separate, distinct cohort for their PM session).
- o **NEW (Term 4):** For Term 3, **special education self-contained classrooms** were approved for 50% capacity. For Term 4, schools may increase the number of students up to a traditional self-contained program capacity, taking into consideration the classroom size and staffing ratio.

STAFF COHORT INTERACTION

Cohort guidance is in place for staff that routinely interact with student cohorts through time in the classroom with a student cohort. This guidance does not apply to brief interactions with students in the hallway or during arrival. In previous staff cohort interaction guidance, based on DC Health’s guidelines, different staff categories were given different maximums on the number of student cohorts they could interact with. **For Term 4, all staff categories that routinely interact with student cohorts will be able to interact with up to four student cohorts per term for indoor programming.** For staff that are solely outdoors for instruction, they may interact with up to six student cohorts per term.

Any requests for consideration of staff interaction with more than four student cohorts per term can be submitted for review. A determination will be made on a case-by-case basis, in alignment with DC Health requirements.

To minimize staff and student cohort interaction, the following parameters must be applied:

Staff Schedule Type*	Cohort Maximums**	Details
Elementary Instructional Staff	Interact with no more than four student cohorts/term	This applies to any position that is in the classroom for much of the school day with a student cohort, inclusive of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In Person Learning (IPL) classroom teachers and aides • Canvas, Academics, and Real Engagement (CARE) facilitators
Secondary Instructional Staff	Interact with no more than four student cohorts/term	This applies to any position that is in the classroom for much of the school day with a student cohort, inclusive of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In Person Learning (IPL) classroom teachers and aides • Canvas, Academics, and Real Engagement (CARE) facilitators
Self-Contained Special Education Teachers	Interact with no more than four cohorts	This applies to any position that is in the classroom for much of the school day with a student cohort, inclusive of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In Person Learning (IPL) classroom teachers and aides • Canvas, Academics, and Real Engagement (CARE) facilitators
Staff providing classroom cohort	Interact with no more than four student cohorts/term	Relief staff are roles that spend time in the classroom with a student cohort. For example, this is staff that may provide teacher break coverage, lunch coverage, or recess coverage.

coverage (relief staff)		
Push In Services <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SPED Resource • ELL • Related Services • Required SEL services • Observations/IMPACT 	The number of cohorts that have the providers caseload of students who must be served in person.	<p>For the listed push in services, as required, these providers may temporarily push-in to a classroom as the 13th person.</p> <p>The position should be there for the minimum amount of time needed to provide the required service. Only one position should push in at a time.</p>
Pull Out Services <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SPED Resource • ELL • Related Services • Required SEL • Tutoring/Mentoring 	No cohort interaction	<p>For the listed pull-out services, as required, these providers may temporarily pull students out of their cohort to provide required services in a learning space that follows health and safety guidelines.</p> <p>Every effort should be made for a student to stay in a consistent pull-out group to reduce the need for cohort mixing.</p>
Staff not scheduled to interact with classroom cohorts (Leadership, Administrative)	No cohort interaction	<p>Staff not scheduled to interact with cohorts should limit cohort interaction to the greatest extent feasible.</p> <p>If these staff, who are NOT routinely scheduled with student cohorts, provide substitute coverage related to unforeseen circumstances, see “substitutes” cohort guidance.</p>
Substitute/Temporary Coverage	<p>Substitutes and employees who primarily serve in other roles and are asked to provide temporary coverage as substitutes if needed are limited to interacting with a cumulative total of four cohorts per term.</p> <p>The cohort guidance for substitutes must be followed for traditional substitutes (i.e. those scheduled through the substitute pool) as well as any other staff who may be called upon to provide temporary coverage if classroom support is needed. ***</p>	

**The staffing plan should ensure that cohort to staffing ratios can support the outlined cohort guidelines.*

***If there are instances where the cohort guidance cannot be adhered to because staff have reached cohort maximum interactions, please connect with your Instructional Superintendents to develop a plan to address these challenges.*

**** This category includes any staff providing coverage, such as NAF Staff, Pathways Coordinators, MSLS, DSLs, Counselors, Athletic Trainers, Athletic Directors, Librarians, Social Worker, Psychologist, Attendance Counselor, Behavior Technician, New Heights, Administration, Assistant Principals, Deans of Students, and School Program Providers (SPPs).*

Additional Considerations

Push-in and Pull-out Programming

- When feasible, additional programming and services should be provided virtually. If it must be provided in-person, then two options are possible:
 - The support specialist or staff member pushes into the classroom and serves the student; or

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- The student is pulled out of class for one-on-one support in a learning space that follows health and safety guidelines. Any shared supplies must be cleaned between students.

Arrival and Dismissal

- Every effort should be taken to reduce cohort mixing during the arrival and dismissal process.
- Given the unpredictability of student and family schedules, if multiple cohorts arrive at the same time, please ensure social distancing and use of masks are in place to minimize risk. The brevity of these processes, paired with the fact that they largely occur outdoors, also minimize risk.

Staff

- Staff, of all categories, should limit interaction with one another and should use virtual platforms for meetings and communication whenever possible.
- Related Service Providers (RSPs) should move services to a virtual platform as feasible. In the rare case that RSPs must provide in person services, the number of students with whom these staff interact in person should be limited.
- Staff who are required to visit schools as a core function of their role but do not interact directly with student cohorts (e.g. Instructional Superintendents, Strategic School Operations team staff, Facilities team staff, Food & Nutrition Services team staff) should limit the number of schools visited daily to two, with no more than 10 schools visited in one school week.

Students

- A student should only be part of one cohort per term at the secondary level and no more than two cohorts per term at the elementary level. Students who are part of a cohort may leave the cohort to receive required services, so long as all safety measures are followed (I.e. minimum of 6 ft social distancing, use of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), etc.)
- Student cohorts should be maintained for the duration of the term.

Indoor Space Use

- Each student cohort should have a designated classroom or space where they spend their day.
- Schools should not plan for cohorts to use the same space concurrently indoors, such as the gym or auditorium. However, on a limited basis, if schools require use of cafeteria space for mealtime, two cohorts can be present in the cafeteria space if they are able to maintain a distance of 10- 15 feet between cohorts.

Outdoor Space Use

- When outdoors, instructional staff may interact with no more than six student cohorts.
 - For example, Health and Physical Education instructors can interact with no more than six student cohorts outdoors for PE courses.
 - There must be a clear plan established for how schools would safely transition this programming indoors while following cohort guidance. I.e. in the event of extreme weather that would require outdoor programming to move indoors, there must be a strategy to ensure cohort guidance is followed indoors.
- Recess and physical education should be conducted outside whenever feasible.
 - Multiple cohorts can be outdoors concurrently; however, the cohorts should be kept socially distant through the use of different areas of outdoor space.