

**THE MASSACHUSETTS
EDUCATIONAL THEATER
GUILD**



**CONSIDERATIONS FOR
THEATER EDUCATORS:**

**REOPENING
CLASSROOMS AND
PERFORMANCE SPACES
IN MASSACHUSETTS**



WWW.METG.ORG

INTRODUCTION

For almost 90 years the Massachusetts Educational Theater Guild (METG) has been at the center of educational theater in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, celebrating excellence in the theatrical arts and supporting teachers and students.

The ongoing community spread of SARS CoV-2 (COVID-19) and the resultant closures of schools, businesses, and performance and community spaces has had a devastating impact on theater education and performance in Massachusetts. Social distancing guidelines, coupled with restrictions on use of large venues and large group gatherings require a reimagining of how students, teachers, and patrons gather to create and celebrate art.

The METG firmly believes that COVID-19 should not justify closing or reducing support for theater educators, theater programs, and theatrical productions.

We believe that doing so would be detrimental to the social and emotional growth of students and that many of these programs may never recover. **We must learn how to adapt given the unprecedented circumstances.**

Arts programs are the soul of school and community buildings in Massachusetts. Art hangs on bulletin boards and in the stairways of our schools, music fills the hallways with comforting sounds, theater invites needed escape from reality, an opportunity to spend a few hours seeing the world through someone else's eyes. The arts provide a creative outlet for expression, reflection, empathy, and creative problem solving, skills vital in our quickly changing world.

We will do all that we can to sustain the vibrant artistic communities in our schools. The METG remains steadfastly committed to be a partner with you in this important work.

Please see the current version of the Massachusetts Educational Theater Guild's (METG) Considerations for Theater Educators: Reopening Classrooms and Performance Spaces. As public health guidance and reopening guidelines evolve, so too will this guidance.



ABOUT THE METG

The Massachusetts Educational Theater Guild provides opportunities for students and teachers to create, share and respond to theatrical experiences. We believe that participation in the arts empowers students to be creative and compassionate, builds their personal confidence, and cultivates an appreciation of a diversity of thoughts, identities, and cultures. The METG supports programming in three main areas:

We CELEBRATE. Teachers. Students. Artists. Designers. Actors.
We do so through festivals, through scholarships and contests, and through opportunities for recognition.

We SUPPORT. Teachers. Students. Artists. Designers. Actors.
We do so through workshops, professional development, coaching, mentoring, adjudications, and opportunities for artistic leadership.

We CHAMPION. Teachers. Students. Artists. Designers. Actors.
We do so through advocacy for teachers, for students, and for public funding for the arts, support for program building, and opportunities for building theatrical networks.

150

Number of public, private, parochial, and charter middle and high school members

50+

Number of volunteers that guide our programs as Board and Council members, including superintendents, arts administrators, teachers, and representatives from local theaters

5000

Number of students that participate in our programs each year



Strategies for Reopening

Universal Disease Transmission Mitigation Strategies

- Increased access to hand sanitizer/installation of additional hand sanitization stations
- Increased cleaning and sanitization of all high touch surfaces
- Maximizing physical distancing in all spaces
- Consistent use of masks in all spaces
- Use of technology to reduce reliance on face-to-face interactions
- Requesting completion of [health screening checklists](#) for students prior to entering rehearsals, for visiting artists, audience members, etc.

Academic Instruction/Classroom Management

- Consider shorter classes to accommodate more classes consisting of smaller class sizes.
- (If students are changing classes) Consider having classes meet in vignette style groupings.
- Consider staggered seating / standing to ensure safe distances.
- Use larger spaces to support teaching of theater classes (lecture halls, theater, cafeteria, etc.)
- Consider having the theater teacher teach virtually to a contained classroom.
- Consider having the theater teacher rotate from classroom to classroom (as opposed to students rotating).
- Where facilities allow: Create a traffic flow map to decrease static motion and increase ease of social distance.
- Consider “staging / spiking” marks on the floor to indicate where students should stand (and practice social distancing).
- Passing periods/time between classes may need to be extended to be able to sanitize high use surfaces.
- Consider using pre-recorded concerts during class times.

Considerations for Distance Learning/Performance

- Quality microphone/device for teacher delivery of distance teaching.
- Quality webcam for teacher delivery of distance learning.
- Quality webcam within contained classroom so teacher can plan for and utilize the space if teaching virtually.
- There will need to be significant investment in recording equipment and software to produce pre-recorded or live stream performances.



Strategies for Reopening (cont.)

Considerations for Backstage

- Students should bring their own makeup or be assigned makeup for single use
- Avoid use of dressing rooms if physical distancing isn't possible, consider other alternatives or create a schedule for use and/or map of traffic flow
- Refrain from sharing costumes
- Refrain from using costumes when feasible; clean and sanitize costumes daily
- Refrain from using stage curtains as they cannot be sanitized easily (if at all)
- Purchase of a UV sanitizing cabinet for handheld props, etc.
- Limitations on use of sets, scenery, and props to avoid additional surfaces requiring sanitization
- Limitations on use of sets, scenery, and props to avoid utilizing necessary space backstage to maximize physical distancing
- Limitations on use of sets, scenery, and props that require more than one student to move.
- Limit use of personal or handheld microphones to reduce touchpoints/need for sanitization
- For shared theater technology (sound boards, light boards, follow spots, power tools etc.) require use of gloves and develop sanitization plans

Considerations for Front of House

- Eliminate the use of cash/checks at the box office- consider pre-purchase of tickets online or use of contactless card readers to eliminate touchpoints
- For schools producing in-person performances, stagger arrival and seating times for patrons to maximize physical distancing.
- Consider performances in larger, non-traditional spaces with optimal air flow (e.g. outdoors, gyms, cafeterias).
- Consider staggered seating to promote physical distancing; increase capacity of seating as public health regulations/state policy allow.
- Production budgets may be impacted, especially given that ticket revenue will be limited if venue capacity is limited.
- Eliminate or limit intermissions and post-show gatherings to avoid crowding; require all patrons to immediately exit the theater after the show.
- Eliminate sale of concessions or provide limited selection/contactless pickup

Considerations for Rehearsals

- Consider a mix of virtual and in-person rehearsals to maximize social distancing
- Consider rehearsing in non-traditional spaces to maximize social distancing, including outdoor spaces, gyms, cafeterias, lecture halls, etc.
- Prohibit food/drink in rehearsals; require students to label water bottles to prevent accidental sharing of personal items
- Limit number of students that attend rehearsals; consider staggering rehearsal start times for small groups and allow for time in between for cleaning of space and students to safely exit rehearsal space



Strategies for Reopening (cont.)

Considerations for Performance

- Consider smaller group performances; reduce total number of students involved in productions to maximize social distancing
- Avoid performances where student-to-student contact is required
- Avoid performances that involve shouting and/or other large expressions of breath
- Consider digital presentation if possible (video rights are now available for many shows); using public domain material to help reduce production costs
- Limit entrances and exits of students in performance to maximize social distancing
- Consider performances in larger, non-traditional spaces with optimal air flow (e.g. outdoors) or those with sufficient HVAC capacity (e.g. gyms, cafeterias)
- Consider concert style performances of musicals, although musicals should be performed in accordance with reopening guidelines issued by music organizations (e.g. MMEA)
- Consider performances where masks or facial coverings can be incorporated into production concept
- Consider non-traditional performance opportunities (e.g. festivals of monologues or two-person scenes) that can be performed in accordance with social distancing requirements

External Resources

- <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/downloads/community-mitigation-strategy.pdf>
- <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/php/open-america/community-mitigation.html>
- <https://www.schooltheatre.org/blogs/edta-news/2020/03/11/edta-update-re-coronavirus-covid-19-impact-on-scho>
- <https://www.ncarts.org/guide-reopening-arts-homepage>
- <https://www.apap365.org/COVID-19/COVID-19-Resources>
- <http://www.doe.mass.edu/covid19/>
- <https://www.actsafe.ca/covid-19-resources-for-the-arts-and-entertainment-industries/>

Contact Us

- For general information about the METG, please contact metg@metg.org
- For assistance with this guidance, please contact Dennis Canty, METG Executive Director at dcanty@metg.org

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