



May 12, 2021

Jeffrey C. Riley  
Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education  
MA Department of Elementary and Secondary Education  
75 Pleasant Street  
Malden, MA 02148

Dear Commissioner Riley:

Thank you for your continued leadership and advocacy on behalf of the performing and visual arts students in the Commonwealth. DESE's March approval of the resumption of singing in the schools and rehearsing guidelines has been well received by schools across the state. I am sure you have seen the stories, articles, photos, and posts reflecting this.

As DESE prepares to return to full in-person learning and spacing accommodations have been changed to reflect the recent CDC guidelines, we are inquiring as to when DESE will release updated guidelines regarding music and performing arts that are in alignment with the ones being used to allow a decrease of spacing in the classrooms?

As you are aware, the CDC guidelines of March 19, 2021, have reduced most spacing considered safe for students to return to face-to-face learning. This includes singing and the playing of most wind instruments, which are now recommended to be safe at 6 feet with appropriate masking. The majority of the neighboring mid-Atlantic and New England states are following these 6-foot guidelines recommended by the CDC (See Attached).

As you know, the Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs (EEA), has set guidelines for community sports which most public schools are following, and now allows contact sports and activities such as basketball, wrestling practice, and cheerleading all of which are occurring inside school buildings. These activities certainly produce similar amounts of airborne droplets that can carry and spread COVID-19 when compared to the aerosol particulates produced in music performing activities. Our **Arts for All** member groups, agencies, and parents have the same inquiry: either it is safe for everyone to engage in all of these activities (including singing and wind instruments) in close proximity inside schools, or it isn't.

We know that preparing for our students to return to full-time learning has created many complex issues and details; however, this includes core-curricular arts education courses such as music, dance, theatre, and visual/media arts. The CDC has already addressed this, and we look forward to DESE's updated guidelines allowing the spacing adjustment for music be reduced from 10 feet to 6 feet. During hybrid, cohort and remote learning, spacing for



Letter to Commissioner Riley, 5-12-2021, continued:

musicians and singers was somewhat easier due to the smaller number of students in buildings at the same time. However, with a full return to school occurring now across the Commonwealth, we all know that all districts do not have the same access to large available open spacing (both indoor or outdoor) to accommodate 10-foot spacing for especially singing and wind instruments.

Thank you for your time and attention to this critical and time-sensitive issue. We look forward to the revised guidelines and if we or any of our member agencies can be of any further assistance on this matter, please do not hesitate to reach out. As this school year is almost at a close, it is imperative that music parity is addressed both for the students now and for those in the 2021/2022 school year. Administrators and educators need to have enough time to prepare appropriate physical spaces, organize schedule changes to accommodate changing COVID-19 regulations, and to implement ongoing curricular modifications.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Jonathan C. Rappaport'.

Jonathan C. Rappaport

On Behalf of The Arts for All Coalition

- Arts|Learning
- Boston Area Kodály Educators
- Boston Public Schools Department of the Arts
- EdVestors
- Massachusetts-American String Teacher's Association
- Massachusetts Art Education Association
- Massachusetts Association for Jazz Education
- Massachusetts Dance Education Organization
- Massachusetts Educational Theater Guild
- Massachusetts Music Educators Association
- Massachusetts Music Supporters Coalition
- MASSCreative
- New England American Orff-Schulwerk Organization

Additional Organizations

- North Andover Music Association

c.c.: (next page)



c.c.:

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Secretary of Public Health and Human Services Marylou Sudders  
Secretary of Education James Peyser  
Commissioner Riley's Office:

- Leldamy Correa
- Helene Bettencourt

Dawn Benski, Arts Content Lead, MA DESE

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