

Addendum 7

Adapt, Advance, Achieve: Connecticut's Plan to Learn and Grow Together

Connecticut State Department of Education



COVID-19 Considerations for Connecticut PreK–12 Arts Programs

August 14, 2020 (Revised October 18, 2021)

As the COVID-19 pandemic continues, it is essential for Connecticut schools to maintain challenging and rigorous programs of study in the arts across all grade levels. As detailed in the [Connecticut Arts Standards](#), meaningful music learning equally includes the artistic processes of creating, responding, performing, and connecting. This document provides information and strategies that can be used in school settings as well as during performing arts extracurricular activities to further the theory and practice of arts education in our schools while also providing protective environments for our students and staff to learn and work.

In addition to CDC's general [Guidance for COVID-19 Prevention in K-12 Schools](#), the updated Fall 2021 [CSDE Adapt, Advance, Achieve Reopening document](#), and other state and federal resources, the guidance contained in this document is largely informed by the results of the international [University of Colorado study](#), [American Choral Directors Association \(ACDA\)](#), and recommendations of the [National Association for Music Education \(NAfME\)](#), [National Federation of High School Associations \(NFHS\) Guidance on Returning to Marching Band](#), and [New York State School Music Association \(NYSSMA\) Guidance for School Ensembles](#). In particular, the University of Colorado study examined aerosol rates produced during different performing arts activities, and how quickly the aerosols generated by these activities accumulated in a space. These observational measures were then used to develop assessments of COVID-19 transmission risk that may exist in performing arts classrooms and performance venues.

It is important to note that the recommendations contained in this guidance may reduce the risks of COVID-19 transmission associated with performing arts activities, but they will not eliminate those risks entirely. Within the parameters of any current federal, state, or local requirements for schools and districts should continue to comply with their local departments of public health to safeguard the health and safety of students and staff.

Universal Considerations for Arts Instruction and Activities

In addition to the general requirements and recommendations for schools contained in the updated Fall 2021 version of the [CSDE Adapt, Advance, Achieve Reopening document](#), there are several strategies that can be applied to arts instruction and activities that can lower the risk of COVID-19 transmission among participants and keep everyone involved learning and working.

Vaccination

Vaccination is currently the most important and effective strategy for preventing COVID-19 infections and transmission in schools and other settings. CDC indicates that vaccination can greatly benefit students and staff based on the fact that fully vaccinated students and staff:

- are much less likely to become infected, suffer from complications of COVID-19, or transmit the virus to others;

- no longer need to quarantine after exposure to a known COVID-19 case if they remain asymptomatic;
- do not need to be included in regular screening testing programs for COVID-19; and
- do not need to wear a mask in crowded outdoor settings (unless instructed to do so while awaiting a negative test after close contact with a known case).

Arts organizations and school districts should strongly encourage all eligible students and staff to get fully vaccinated (i.e., two weeks after the 2nd dose of Pfizer or Moderna mRNA vaccines or the single dose of Johnson & Johnson vaccine) against COVID-19 to protect themselves, their families, and their communities. The Connecticut Department of Public Health (DPH) and Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) have developed a useful vaccine toolkit ([#Vax2SchoolCT](#)) to assist school districts with the planning and execution of vaccine clinics.

Mask Wearing

As of July 27, 2021, CDC advises universal indoor masking for all teachers, staff, students, and visitors to PreK-12 schools, regardless of vaccination status. Likewise, given the potential that many Connecticut students and their family members remain unvaccinated, the emergence of more transmissible virus variants, the increased person-density inside school buildings and performing arts spaces with the return to full in-person learning, and the medical and/or developmental need for some students to participate in-person without a mask in many schools, DPH is firm in its opinion that universal masking should continue in PreK–12 school settings at this time.

The current DPH Commissioner’s Order incorporated by reference into Executive Order 13A, which is scheduled to remain in effect until February 15, 2022, mandates that all students and staff must wear a mask that completely covers the nose and mouth while inside a PreK-12 school building. Individual school districts should determine, in consultation with their local health department and district medical advisors, under what conditions **limited exceptions** to the continuous wearing of appropriate face coverings by students actively engaged in music, dramatic arts, or other performing arts activities would be necessary and appropriate. For performing arts activities, necessary and appropriate exceptions might include:

- allowing students and staff to engage in performing arts activities without masks in outdoor spaces, even when extended distancing is not possible;
- allowing wind instrument players to pull down their masks intermittently during active instrument playing indoors, provided instrument bell covers are in use;
- using a split-style mask that allows for the playing of a wind instrument while a mask is kept in place; and
- allowing featured actors or soloists (i.e., not the entire company or chorus) to remove their masks while on stage and “in-scene” during productions, provided they are fully vaccinated

Again, decisions regarding these or any other exceptions to mask wearing being considered for performing arts activities in PreK–12 schools should be made in consultation with local health departments, school medical advisors, and school nurse supervisors, with consideration for the risks of, benefits of, and alternatives to the removal of masks, and in the context of local conditions related to ongoing COVID-19 transmission in schools and the community.

Physical Distancing

As mentioned previously, with students returning to full-time in-person learning, schools may find certain mitigation strategies particularly difficult to fully implement in the coming school year versus their experience with those strategies during the previous year. In particular, classroom spacing beyond what would be considered normal in schools before the pandemic may not be feasible given the goal in our state to move to full in-person learning for all students.

DPH continues to recommend that schools continue their efforts to maximize distance between students to the extent feasible, however assuming that the amount of space available for performing arts instruction and other activities in schools is a fixed and limited variable, the ability to maintain distance inside the available space given a higher person-density may also be limited. To the extent feasible, schools should strive to provide **at least 3 feet of space** between students during arts instruction as well as during performances or other related activities. In all cases, more space is better, but this is especially true during times when increased amounts of respiratory droplets are actively being generated (e.g., during singing, loud/projected speaking, wind instrument playing). School administrators and arts instructors should consider increased spacing of individuals engaged in these activities if sufficient space is available and increasing the distance between performers is practical.

Ventilation

Although direct exchange of larger respiratory droplets between individuals in close contact has been implicated as the main route of transmission for SARS-CoV-2, it is possible that smaller aerosol-sized particles can also transmit this virus, particularly in situations where the person-density inside a room is high, one or more individuals is actively generating respiratory aerosols and shedding virus, and ventilation is inadequate. With that in mind, particular attention to ventilation conditions and the potential for the concentration of aerosols should be paid to PreK-12 arts instructional and performance spaces. DPH recommends that school administrators discuss options to increase available ventilation in their performing arts spaces with staff, while also working with a qualified Heating, Ventilation, and Air Conditioning (HVAC) consultant to ensure that central HVAC components are serving performing arts spaces according to appropriate standards. Some considerations for improving ventilation around performing arts activities might include:

- moving instructional, rehearsal, and/or events to outdoor spaces if practical, especially those that involve singing and wind instrument playing;
- limiting the duration of active singing and instrument playing in indoor spaces (ideally 50 minutes or less);
- building in a short instructional break (e.g., 5–10 minutes) during which instructional activities that do not involve active aerosol generation are undertaken (e.g., music theory, etc.); this break will allow mechanical ventilation systems to “catch up” and reduce aerosol concentrations;
- ensuring that adequate amounts of fresh outdoor air is supplied to the space via central mechanical or other means (e.g., window exhaust fans, open windows, etc.), ideally consistent with [ASHRAE 62.1 standards](#) for performing arts classrooms;
- ensuring that any recirculated air is filtered appropriately using filters with a MERV 13 rating or higher; and
- adding stand-alone HEPA filtration units (i.e., filtration without other features such as ‘ionization’ or ‘UV’ air cleaning) to performing arts classrooms where no other means of sufficient ventilation is available (NOTE: these appliances are not recommended universally and are unlikely to impact aerosol concentrations in spaces with adequate ventilation already in place).

Hygiene Practices

CDC continues to recommend frequent hand washing as an additional strategy in schools to help prevent the spread of COVID-19 and other infectious diseases. DPH recommends that schools:

- teach and reinforce good hand hygiene, including handwashing with soap and running water for at least 20 seconds;
- remind students and staff to wash hands frequently, including after toileting, eating, or visiting common areas; and,
- assist young children with handwashing to ensure that it is done effectively.

DPH encourages schools to have hand sanitizer containing at least 60% alcohol available in arts classrooms and encourage students to sanitize hands before and after class, and anytime they are using shared objects. Hand sanitizer should be stored up, away, and out of sight of young children, and should be used only with adult supervision for children under 6 years of age.

Instructors should instruct students how to appropriately clean instruments and other objects after use and prior to storage. Alternatively, instructors may perform this task themselves to ensure objects are properly cleaned.

No discharge of instrument water valves (“spit valves”) should occur on the floor of instructional, practice, or performance spaces. Absorbent pads or dedicated containers to discharge valves should be provided in practice and performance locations. Water valves should be positioned as close to the absorbent pad as possible prior to clearing (lift pad to position in front of valve, if possible). Students should dispose of their absorbent pad at the end of the instructional period or otherwise when necessary, and clean their hands with either soap and running water or hand sanitizer after disposal is complete.

Screening Testing

In contrast to “diagnostic testing,” which is used to determine whether someone with COVID-19 symptoms or someone who has been exposed to a known case is infected with SARS-CoV-2, “screening testing” refers to periodic testing of individuals without either COVID-19 symptoms or known exposures to others infected with SARS-CoV-2. Screening testing is beneficial for early identification and isolation of asymptomatic infected individuals to prevent additional virus transmission and outbreaks.

Because of the increased person-density in schools during the current school year, the circulation of more transmissible viral variants, and the expectation that COVID-19 case rates could increase as students return to full-time in-person learning, DPH recommends that schools work with state-supported or other testing partners on a voluntary basis to add a component of screening testing for students to their operational plans, especially in schools where students are not yet eligible for vaccination (i.e., PreK-6). Resources may be available to assist Connecticut schools with the implementation and ongoing operationalization of screening testing. For more information, school administrators are invited to contact SchoolCovidTesting@ct.gov.

In addition to routine screening testing for larger school populations, schools may wish to consider adding “event-based” **SARS-CoV-2 testing of artists and performers who are not fully vaccinated** to the set of procedures to be implemented around large-scale arts performances (e.g., holiday concerts, dramatic productions, etc.). This procedure might involve any of the following:

- requiring a negative molecular (e.g., PCR) test 1–3 days prior to the scheduled event;
- serial rapid antigen testing 2–3 times per week during the show run; and
- a single rapid antigen test within 24 hours, or two tests within 48 hours, of a one-time production event.

Event-based COVID-19 screening testing can add an important layer of protection against COVID-19 transmission during these events by significantly reducing the risk that an infected performer would be generating large amounts of infectious aerosols during dress rehearsals or events attended by the public, some of whom may be at risk of severe complications associated with COVID-19 infection.

Staying Home When Sick or When Isolating/Quarantining

Often, COVID-19 outbreaks have occurred when individuals who had very mild symptoms that could be associated with COVID-19 ignored or dismissed those symptoms as some other condition and went about interacting with others. Staying home when feeling sick with symptoms consistent with COVID-19 is essential to keep COVID-19 infections out of schools and prevent spread to others. Students, teachers, and staff who have symptoms of any potentially infectious illness should stay home and be referred to their healthcare provider for diagnostic testing and care. Schools should clearly communicate their illness policies regarding when individuals should stay away from the school (e.g., when child has a fever, persistent cough, etc.) and when they can return to school (e.g., fever resolved for 24 hours

and negative COVID-19 test, etc.), and should be prepared to immediately isolate and send home any students or staff who report to the school with obvious symptoms. Unfortunately, in some cases, this may negatively impact an individual's ability to participate in arts performances for which they have invested many hours of practice and preparation. However, in light of more transmissible variants of SARS-CoV-2 and the persistent active generation of aerosols during many performing arts activities, instructors and students should be reminded of the importance to their health and the health of their classmates and fellow artists of staying home when they are feeling ill, or they are directed to isolate or quarantine by health officials.

Transportation

Currently, a Federal CDC Order is in place that requires mask wearing by individuals on all public transportation conveyances including school buses, regardless of individuals' vaccination status. Passengers and drivers must wear a mask on school buses at all times, including on buses operated by public and private school systems, subject to the exclusions and exemptions in CDC's Order. Schools should provide masks to those students who need them (including on buses), such as students who forgot to bring their mask or whose families are unable to afford them. Schools must consider, on an individualized basis, appropriate accommodations for students with disabilities who are unable to wear a mask on a school bus or other mode of transportation provided by the school.

DPH recommends improving ventilation on buses when they are occupied by allowing windows to be opened. Even a small opening in bus windows can have a significant impact on the amount of available fresh outdoor dilution air entering the occupied space. Chaperones traveling with bands, choruses, or other school performing artist groups should remind students that instruments should remain stowed during travel and any pre-event "warm-up" activities should wait until the group has exited the bus.

Performance Event Planning

DPH recognizes that there are real and significant benefits of performing arts activities in the development of student achievement and the enjoyment of the adults that support those students. However, not all performance types and spaces have the same potential to spread infectious respiratory droplets, and therefore, certain activities have more potential to negatively impact communities. While the spread of COVID-19 among groups of performers and audience members presents a risk, careful planning in consultation with administrators, staff, medical advisors, and local health officials can help ensure that the many benefits of operating performing arts events outweigh the risks of COVID-19 impacts. Some things to consider in the design of arts events and performances:

- **Community transmission rates:** The risk of COVID-19 transmission associated with any performing arts event will depend partially on the current dynamics of disease transmission both within the school and in the larger community. In schools and communities where vaccination rates are higher, the risk of COVID-19 transmission and in particular the most severe impacts of COVID-19 disease are likely to be significantly lower. In addition, the risk associated with any large public event (including arts performances open to the public) is likely to be higher when community COVID-19 case rates are higher. School administrators should be in continuous communication with local health officials and their medical advisors and school nurses to consider local conditions related to COVID-19 transmission when considering whether, and on what scale, to operate performing arts events that are open to the public in their schools or elsewhere in their communities.
- **Setting of the event:** In general, the risk of COVID-19 transmission is lower when outdoors than in indoor settings. Consider the ability to maintain physical distancing in various settings when engaging in practices, rehearsals, and performances (e.g., size of a stage area, number of individuals in a space at any time during the performance, separating aerosol-generating activities from other lower risk activities during practice times, moving to larger outdoor spaces). Consider the inclusion of a "virtual option" for viewing performances (if desired, a link can be provided for "donations" to make up for any lost revenue from individuals who would normally attend in-person).

- **Physical closeness of performers and audience members:** The spread of COVID-19 is more likely to occur during activities that require sustained close contact. Plan for spacing between performers to the extent practical and consider reducing the number of individuals in a particular performance space at any one time if space is limited. Consider selling only advance tickets to performances in blocks, allowing for 6 ft. spacing between block groups. Consider moving events outdoors and utilizing sound enhancing technologies to allow individuals to enjoy the performance at a further distance.
- **Level of intensity of activity:** The risk of COVID-19 spread increases with the intensity and increased exhalation involved with certain performance types. The need for specific mitigation strategies may vary depending on the type of activity and expected level of droplet generation. For example, a spoken-word or “play” type production may be lower risk than a musical or choral production, or string quartets may be lower risk than jazz ensembles. Not all performances are the same, and performance organizers and administrators should consider which mitigation strategies may or may not make sense for any given production.
- **Duration of time:** The risk of COVID-19 spread increases the more time performers, teachers, staff, and audience members spend in close proximity or in indoor group settings. This includes time spent traveling to/from events, meetings, meals, congregating in lobbies before performances and during intermissions, and other settings related to the events. Reducing the overall length of time of practices, rehearsals, and performance events can reduce the risk of COVID-19 transmissions associated with those activities. Consider shortening events to eliminate the need for intermissions or other breaks for audience members to move about and congregate in restrooms or other congested areas. Consider eliminating concessions, bake sales, or other eating/drinking activities associated with performance events that would require individuals to congregate without masks in place.
- **Other mitigation strategies:**
 - Consider whether event spaces are conducive to controlled ingress and egress.
 - Choose spaces that provide good ventilation for the expected person-density inside the space. Reduce the size of the audience in venues where ventilation is inadequate.
 - Encourage any indoor congregating before and after performances to occur in very large spaces (e.g., gymnasiums, cafeterias, etc.) rather than congested hallways, areas just outside auditoriums, or building entrance areas. Ideally, eliminate indoor gathering before and after performances and move these activities to available outdoor spaces.
 - Post signage indicating the need for consistent and correct masking by all individuals when inside the building (including when seated during the performance) regardless of vaccination status.
 - Encourage anyone planning to attend performances to stay home if they are experiencing any symptoms associated with COVID-19, regardless of their vaccination status, or if they have been directed to isolate or quarantine.
 - Consider encouraging individuals who are not fully vaccinated to get a COVID-19 test prior to attending the event to further protect the health of the performers and vulnerable community members in attendance.

The Importance of Continued Arts Instruction in the COVID-19 Environment

The impact of arts instruction on the well-rounded education of a child is critical and necessary during this time of a pandemic. As stated in the Connecticut State Board of Education (Board) Position Statement on the Implementation of the Connecticut Arts Standards, arts learning should occur through education focused on the whole child in order to promote artistically literate citizens well equipped with the creativity, communication, and critical thinking skills needed to live rich, meaningful lives. An artistically literate citizen has the knowledge, skills, and understanding to actively engage in the arts throughout their lives. This citizen has practice in processes unique to each of the five arts’ disciplines:

dance, media arts, music, theatre, and visual arts. In many communities statewide, arts education is intricately woven into the fibers of each school community, and families are continually touched by the district programming.

The Arts have a profound positive effect on contributing to students' socio-emotional needs (e.g., self-expression, self-regulation, positive interactions/engagement) and joy crucial to their individual growth and development. The Arts allow students to develop and realize their own creative potential while acquiring lifelong skills in creative thinking, social and emotional awareness, collaborative work, effective communication, logical reasoning, and meta-cognition. These skills and experiences have been identified as key characteristics for lifelong learners and have a powerful and positive effect far beyond the arts experience ([Connecticut Guide to K-12 Program Development in the Arts](#)).

The Arts allow students to express ideas, feelings, and human experiences through a variety of media. Participation in the Arts, especially during the formative years, can aid in the development of students as culturally responsive, compassionate, creative, and contributing members of society. Teachers from all disciplines are committed to the sharing of knowledge and culture from one generation to the next. The Arts are integral to linking students to the past and connecting them to the future. The Arts challenge us to rethink perspectives in the pursuit of creating a better world.

Additional Resources

- [Connecticut State Department of Education's COVID-19 Reopening Plan: Adapt, Advance, Achieve: Connecticut's Plan to Learn and Grow Together – Fall 2021](#)
- [NFHS Performing Arts Aerosol Study – Phase III](#)
- [Connecticut Arts Administrators Guidance Document](#)
- Lai KM, Bottomley C, Mc Nerney R. Propagation of respiratory aerosols by the vuvuzela. PLoS One. 2011;6(5):e20086. doi:10.1371/journal.pone.0020086
- [West Point Music Research Center](#), courtesy of CW2 Jonathan L. Crane and SGM Denver D. Dill, dated May 29, 2020
- Connecticut Arts Standards' Artistic Processes and Corresponding Anchor Standards
- [Connecticut Arts Administrators Guidance Document](#)
- Creating
 - Anchor Standard 1: Generate and conceptualize artistic ideas and work
 - Anchor Standard 2: Organize and develop artistic ideas and work
 - Anchor Standard 3: Refine and complete artistic work
- Performing/Presenting/Producing
 - Anchor Standard 4: Select, analyze and interpret artistic work for presentation
 - Anchor Standard 5: Develop and refine artistic techniques and work for presentation
 - Anchor Standard 6: Convey meaning through the presentation of artistic work
- Responding
 - Anchor Standard 7: Perceive and analyze artistic work
 - Anchor Standard 8: Interpret intent and meaning in artistic work
 - Anchor Standard 9: Apply criteria to evaluate artistic work
- Connecting
 - Anchor Standard 10: Synthesize and relate knowledge and personal experiences to make art
 - Anchor Standard 11: Relate artist ideas and works with societal, cultural, and historical context to deepen understanding.