



HINGHAM PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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Greetings HPS Community,

I hope this letter finds you well and enjoying these long, warm summer days. The purpose of this evening's communication is to update you on our planning for the reopening of schools in the fall. Our teams of administrators, teachers, parents, and town officials are working hard to finalize our preliminary plan, which will be communicated by the end of next week.

Since school ended in June, I have received countless emails from parents, staff, and members of the community, each with their own thoughts about a return to school. As you might imagine, there are a wide range of opinions. Some want a full and unrestricted return to school, while others express that they do not believe it is safe to return and that we should focus mainly on remote learning.. Despite the differing opinions and perspectives, we must all work together to find the way forward.

While the district continues to work toward maximizing resources that will best support in-person instruction, particularly for our youngest and high-needs learners, we know that 2020-2021 will not be a typical year. We are unequivocally committed to providing a rich and robust academic program, but we also recognize that all reopening decisions must strike the right balance between the academic and social emotional needs of our students and the health and safety of both students and educators. We have listened and we understand the strain on students, families, and educators in the face of such overwhelming uncertainties, but we also know that we can count on the grace, patience, and support of our community as we navigate the best path forward in these most challenging times.

Please note the following updates from the RRAC:

Reopening Plan Timeline: The district's feasibility study and preliminary reopening plan will be completed and submitted to DESE on or before July 31st, with the comprehensive final plan to be completed by August 10th. We are on

target to meet these deadlines. Details of the submissions will be shared publicly during the July 27, August 6, and August 10 School Committee meetings, which will be held via Zoom.

Transportation: This week, our Facilities subcommittee received much anticipated [DESE transportation guidance](#) with regard to bus capacity and protocols. All students must wear masks while on the bus and will be assigned one child per seat in a zig-zag pattern to achieve 3 feet distancing. These requirements bring our transportation capacity to 33% (approximately 25 students) on our [77 passenger busses](#). We appreciate that many families have expressed their willingness to provide their own transportation, but regardless of that commitment, the district is obligated to provide options for all students who are eligible. While this is a major hurdle, we are reviewing current policy and weighing our options for the safe transportation of students. More information on this will be available in the coming weeks.

Health and Safety Protocols: This week, DESE also issued detailed protocols to address various school and community scenarios in which there is a suspected or positive COVID case. Please see the attached slides for a [summary chart](#) for each scenario. We do stress the need for a strong family-school partnership in keeping symptomatic students at home to minimize broader disruption to learning. If a child or staff member experiences any symptoms or is exposed to a COVID positive individual, it is critical that the individual remains at home and follows the protocols outlined for quarantining. As we have stated previously, all children in grades 2-12 and all staff must wear a mask on the bus and in school. Currently, children in grades K and 1 are “strongly encouraged” to wear a mask per DESE guidance. Please note that the School Committee has been requested to consider a policy that requires **all** children to wear a mask on the bus and in school, regardless of age.

“Learn from Anywhere” Model: While we continue to work toward maximizing resources to support in-person instruction, we recognize that changes in conditions may necessitate a period of school closure for some or all HPS students. Therefore, the district is actively planning for significantly enhanced remote learning, to allow students and staff to pivot to this model at any point that it becomes necessary during the 2020-201 school year. According to recent DESE guidance, improved remote learning plans should include defined schedules for daily live/synchronous instruction in the remote setting. To that end, we have purchased laptops for all educators, chromebooks for students in need, and we will offer robust professional development to support live, synchronous instruction in the remote environment.

Potential Hybrid Schedule Cohorts: Given the current guidance on physical distance requirements (i.e., providing 3-6 feet of space between students) the district may be forced to enact a hybrid schedule, with cohorts A/B attending on different days (e.g., alternating half weeks). Unfortunately, with these current distancing requirements, the district is not able to fit all of the students into the schools at the same time. If a proposed hybrid plan is enacted, the district will work to ensure that members of the same family will be grouped together in the same cohort (days of attendance).

Ventilation: Many community members have requested an update regarding progress on improvements to our ventilation system. The HPS Maintenance Department is currently upgrading all MERV-8 filters to finer grade MERV-13 filters. The Maintenance team has also revised building protocols with regard to air transfer and exchange, with increased frequency of duct cleaning.

Specialist Areas/Athletics: DESE has promised forthcoming guidance with regard to specialist areas that require special precautions (e.g.--PE, band, chorus). Ongoing conversations by MIAA are also taking place with regard to fall sports. We do recognize and appreciate the importance of the arts and athletics, and will make every effort to maintain the richness and range of offerings to the extent possible.

Communications and Community Input: In addition to weekly Superintendent messages, there will be a number of opportunities for families and educators to ask questions and provide input on the reopening plan. We appreciate the thoughtful community input on our first School Reopening Family Survey, with over 80% return rate. We do plan to administer a second family survey to accompany the publication of the final reopening plan. That survey will include more specificity around learning models, schedules, and transportation, and will allow parents to make the most informed decisions for their child. Community members are invited to join upcoming School Committee meetings at which reopening plans will be discussed, and we will also host coffee talks to provide more informal opportunities for families and educators to ask questions and share concerns.

Thank you for your continued support of Hingham Public Schools.

Until next time,

Paul Austin, Ph.D.
Superintendent
Hingham Public Schools