



## FAQs: School Committee Approved Plan

### Why is Hingham's plan different from other district plans?

A significant majority of districts (including our benchmark districts) are utilizing a phased-in, multiple cohort, hybrid approach of in person and online instruction similar to the Hingham model. Other districts (approximately 30%) are employing a fully remote model, while very few (5%) are offering full in-person instruction.

All Districts are implementing plans while following [DESE COVID-19 Guidelines](#) and based on their unique:

- Enrollments
- Facility configurations and conditions
- Staffing levels
- Budgets
- Local Board of Health recommendations

### How do the daily schedules compare to other districts?

The daily schedule and hours for in person learning may differ from district to district. The reason is that each district is unique with a different number of: enrolled students, configuration and age of facilities, staffing levels, technology plans, class sizes and funding levels. Hingham Public Schools are committed to providing every student with an effective and meaningful education that advances students through their grade level curriculum throughout the school year.

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There is no “one size fits all” approach or a singular, proven pandemic learning plan template to work from. In Massachusetts, communities retain local control of their schools so they can meet the unique needs of their individual community. Regardless of how our plan appears to compare to other districts, our experienced team of educators has developed a model to meet the needs of all of Hingham’s students.

## Why does the district reopening plan include a remote component?

The district’s “Learn from Anywhere” model allows for fluidity and smoother transitions between the various phases. As phases will change and be dependent upon fluctuating health data, the need to learn from various locations is imperative.

The remote component provides an option for students who prefer to learn from home due to health and safety precautions.

## What curriculum will the district follow?

The district will continue to follow curriculum developed by the Hingham Public Schools. This curriculum was developed with high rigor and standards, while reflective of DESE standards and power standards. In addition, while instruction will be offered through multiple mediums in 2020/2021, the district’s expectation is that all students will move together through their grade appropriate curriculum throughout the school year.

## During the Return to School planning process, was technology and infrastructure for connectivity examined?

Over the summer the district purchased 700 Chromebooks and iPads to distribute to students. The district also purchased laptops for each teacher and increased internet connectivity within each of the buildings.

## Why can't students be in-person more than they are now?

There are several questions related to bringing students back for more in-person instruction, such as:

- Why aren't grades K-2 receiving full in person instruction when DESE and the Governor have provided this guidance and strongly recommended it?
- Why can't you shift higher elementary kids elsewhere and reduce days for middle and high school as other districts seem to have done?
- Why can't the kids who are going to school 2 days a week stay at school for a full day?

As a community, we must acknowledge that each grade level has unique needs that must be met in an equitable manner. Our youngest students are learning to read; our middle school students are preparing for the rigors of high school; our high schoolers are preparing for post-secondary careers and education. Taking all of that into account, the district plan is continually reviewed and adapted to ensure that we can meet the needs of all students during this challenging time. While the Governor and DESE recommend full in-person instruction, they also provide very strict guidance on transportation, physical distance, special education delivery, etc. Given this guidance, our facilities have significant space challenges due to the [DESE social distancing requirements](#) to service the needs of ALL of our students. The district continues to review options to return as many students as possible back into the buildings as possible in a safe and equitable manner.

## Has enrollment changed due to the pandemic?

Enrollment has declined approximately 10%, from 4,300 students to 3,900, as some families have opted for private school or homeschooling. The reopening plan acknowledged that the district would reevaluate the in person learning plan once we understand enrollment levels and the number of students opting for remote-only learning. We intend to adjust schedules when it is safe to extend hours or include more students. It's important to note, however, that we need to anticipate that with a return to full day in-person instruction, families may opt back into the public schools and we must plan for that contingency. In addition, equitable delivery of service to students is a necessity: we cannot have one school or one class fully in-person if that is not offered to all students.

## Why do we have a Monday/Tuesday and Thursday/Friday hybrid schedule?

We have heard questions comparing Hingham to other hybrid schedules such as a week on/week off schedule (cohorts attend in person one week, then remote one week or an AM/PM schedule (cohort A attends in the morning and cohort B in the afternoon).

The RRAC Education subcommittee considered a variety of scheduling options, including AM/PM shifts and alternating weeks and determined that the two day on/three day off schedule works best for Hingham because of:

- providing the most meaningful and consistent instruction
- maximizing in-person instruction hours, and
- delivering the most balanced/equitable delivery model.

As noted, the Learn from Anywhere plan provides for the most flexibility as new information and guidance from DESE and state and local health agencies is provided. In addition, the district continues to plan for utilizing Wednesdays for in-person instruction and continues to review options to expand usable facilities to increase in-person instruction, particularly at the elementary level.

## Are any plans being made to the school calendar to change February, April vacation, or graduation dates?

The Administration and the School Committee will consider changes to the school calendar as the situation necessitates. Depending on how the school year unfolds, the traditional school breaks may feel necessary or we may determine that students need the additional instruction time. Again, we understand that people want certainty and want to plan ahead, but the fluidity of this ever changing novel virus that has created a global pandemic makes future planning challenging.

## How do students and staff maintain social distance as they enter/exit the buildings and change classes?

### Elementary

For arrival, staff will be on duty to greet students, help students find their teachers and classrooms, and encourage social distancing and mask wearing. Bus students will be greeted by staff one bus at a time and enter through the bus loop door and be guided by staff. Each school has separate entrances designated for walkers, bikers and students who are dropped off to help with the social distancing.

For dismissal, students will remain in their classroom until their bus is called and travel to the bus loop with the help of staff. Walkers/bikers will exit through an assigned door based on grade level with the help of staff. Students being picked up by car will be guided by staff.

Arrows are placed on the hallway floors 6 feet apart to assist students with staying apart and moving in proper directions. Movement through the hallways is minimized because specialist classes are held remotely and lunch is eaten primarily at home or a designated room.

### Middle School

Buses will park in the bus loop and dismiss/load students in a staggered and controlled manner. Parent Drop-off takes place by the gymnasium and in the parking lot by the tennis courts. Staff will be present to assist the students.

Students are assigned entrances and exits at the MS according to grade:

6th grade - Main Entrance

7th grade - Gymnasium Entrance

8th grade - Main Stairway Entrance, on the side of the building by the fields.

### High School

Students may use any of these entrances:

1. Main lobby (Union Street)
2. Between counseling office and Room 120 (Union Street)

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3. Between gym and woodshop (back parking lot)
4. Satellite Office (Pleasant Street)
5. Between Room 128 and the wrestling room (across from multipurpose field)

Any option above, plus additional side doors, may be used for exiting school.

Students at the secondary level schedule change classrooms at the end of each block. The schedule has been modified to allow 10 minute passing periods to allow staggered release from classrooms. Arrows are placed in the hallways designating directions with many being one-way to avoid overcrowding.

At the high school students may take outdoor mask breaks by accessing outdoor spaces between classes. Students do not have access to lockers and there is no lingering in school hallways at any time during the day.

Current public health guidance suggests that when wearing a mask, people can be within 6' of each other for periods less than 15 minutes and not increase their risk of contracting COVID-19 which will allow for safe entry/exit from buildings and to and from classrooms.

## Did you consider other spaces to expand classrooms and free up schedules?

The district continues to focus its efforts on finding additional classroom space to extend in-person instruction. To date, we have considered an exhaustive list of spaces inside and outside the school buildings to convert to classroom space and continue to do so to maximize indoor learning spaces. Inside the buildings, common spaces such as libraries and cafeterias are being utilized for additional classroom space (thereby reducing lunch capabilities). The High School and Middle School gyms are used for student activities as well as by the Town for two elections this fall, athletics and Town Meeting. The Elementary gyms are used for mask/snack breaks during inclement weather, indoor instructional spaces, during dismissal to allow for distancing until students are picked up, movement breaks as a part of a student's IEP and storage of excess furniture and equipment. In preparation for Phase 3, storage pods will house excess furniture and equipment to expand student activities.

Every additional space requires more staff to supervise the students which creates a hiring and budget challenge, as well.

Unfortunately, given current state guidelines limiting the number of people in any indoor space or per sq. foot (with the exception of school buildings), all town buildings/properties are closed to the public.

## We need to meet certain metrics in order to move forward in the phasing process. What will these metrics be based on?

Dr. Austin has established a COVID-19 Response Committee consisting of the school physician, school nurses, administrators, HEA President, staff, and the Hingham Public Health Executive Officer to determine when we can safely move to each reopening phase. This committee will determine the metrics.

## Why can't lunch be eaten at school when other districts are allowing lunch at school?

Every district across the Commonwealth (and the nation) has unique capabilities and challenges based on their facilities. With nearly 2,000 students in our Hingham school buildings during each in-person instruction day, the district concluded that we could not meet the [DESE](#), CDC, and local requirements for proper social distancing during meal breaks.

## Many of us in the community are willing to help the district through this unprecedented time. How can we help?

### Follow Safety Guidance

The MOST important thing that our school community can do is to follow current guidance on masks, social distancing, gatherings, hand washing, and travel. Please:

- wear a mask whenever you are with people who do not live in your household;
- ask others to wear masks when they are in your home or vehicle (particularly if you are transporting students to/from school who are not part of your household).
- do not host large gatherings or allow your student to attend large gatherings, particularly parties where social distancing is difficult to maintain.

## Work in the Schools

Additionally, we have multiple job openings, both full and part time, that are crucial to the success of the current hybrid model and are absolutely essential to expand in-person instruction. If you or other adults you know (including recent college graduates) are able to help with this effort, please visit the [HPS Human Resources website](#).

## Other opportunities

We are overwhelmed (but not surprised!) by the creative and generous offers of assistance from so many in the community. More opportunities to support Hingham Public Schools will come in the future and through our six PTOs and numerous other community organizations. While we would like to take advantage of this outpouring of support, there are some obstacles we can't ignore:

- 1) Offers to fundraise for full in person instruction are incredibly generous, but the cost of providing full in person instruction is estimated at well over \$5 million, and it is just not feasible or prudent to attempt to raise that level of funding.
- 2) Visitors are not permitted in the buildings for health and safety purposes. Only select pre-cleared volunteers will be allowed in the buildings.
- 3) Through generous grants from the Hingham Education Foundation and potential reimbursement from the CARES act, we have adequate funds to provide PPE (personal protective equipment) and technology to all staff and students who require it.

**We hear that many Hingham families are hiring private teachers and tutors in order to meet the needs of their students. How do you address this subject for families that can't afford to do this?**

The lack of equity in our nation's public schools has always been a cause for concern and the current pandemic has cast a harsh light on the inequities in public education, generally.



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Nevertheless, the HPS will provide *all* of our students with a 21st century education that meets their needs where they are and will ensure they make the grade appropriate academic, social and emotional growth. While we cannot control what families do outside the classroom, we are committed to providing a high quality educational experience for your children that will instill a life-long love of learning.

## What is happening with Kids in Action?

Kids in Action is a valuable program that provides before-school and after-school care for families with working parents. The program could not operate at full capacity this year because there is not enough classroom space due to the facility requirements for reopening schools. Kids in Action continues to run its PreK program and many of its staff are employed by Hingham Public Schools in other roles.

In conjunction with town officials, the School Committee continues to explore options for to provide a daytime program for children of who may need adult supervision during remote learning. We understand there is a need for this type of programming and we appreciate your patience as we look for appropriate space and staffing for such a program. This has been difficult to implement based on the current staffing shortage in our school buildings.

## What are the plans to support children in the METCO program?

Our METCO students are an integral part of the HPS community and they will participate in the Learn from Anywhere model. Dr. Austin, the METCO director, and the SC METCO liaisons are meeting regularly with METCO parents/guardians to discuss their specific concerns and provide support and guidance as we work through the additional pandemic related challenges of our Boston students

## How will bathrooms be managed/restricted on numbers since children could go in, take off masks and not practice social distancing?

Management of common spaces such as hallways, bathrooms, offices, etc., will be difficult which is why we will be relying on the community to model appropriate social distancing and mask wearing. This is imperative for the health and safety of our staff and of our children. Parents must take this responsibility seriously and we must put our trust in each other that safety protocols are being followed in the school and in the homes.

Elementary students will be supervised by staff when using the restrooms. MS and HS students are allowed to use the bathrooms during and between classes to minimize the number of students at one time. Staff will continue to monitor and clean them.

## How can we make teachers safer and more comfortable in the classrooms?

We recognize and understand the very real anxiety that our teachers are experiencing in providing in person instruction for students during a global pandemic. To help alleviate some of that anxiety, the district has purchased an adequate supply of PPE to ensure the health and safety of our staff and students. This includes face masks, face shields, sanitizing equipment, and plexiglass shields to cover desks.

We must again ask that our community take the threat of this pandemic seriously and consistently wear face masks, practice social distancing, limiting gatherings, and by reducing travel and face-to-face interaction with people outside your household.

## Are students provided with recess (elementary) and mask breaks?

Elementary students have recess breaks during the day, outdoors, weather permitting. While playgrounds will be off-limits, each class will have games, activities, and equipment that are conducive to play, team building, and camaraderie.

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Middle School students do not have recess but outdoor mask breaks are scheduled during the day by grade level to reduce the number of students outside at one time.

At the high school level, students have an opportunity to take outdoor mask breaks between class periods during the extended ten minute passing block added to the HS schedule.

## How will teachers support at home learning when they have the alternate cohort physically in the classroom?

Before the first day of school, teachers completed ten days of professional development to learn best practices in remote and hybrid learning. Teachers are professional educators and have always maintained autonomy in the delivery of classroom instruction, and that autonomy will be maintained during the pandemic, which will allow the teacher to determine how to manage two cohorts. Our teaching staff is highly qualified, with advanced degrees in education, and we are confident in their abilities to progress all children through the grade appropriate curriculum. Like any school year, if you have any concerns that your child is not progressing appropriately, please reach out to your child's classroom teacher.

## How does the staff watch every child so no one can be excited enough to hug or get close to one another?

Parents must be diligent in explaining to their children that the health of their friends and teachers is vitally important and that they must follow all of the schools safety protocols during this pandemic. We know this is incredibly difficult and not the world we wish to live in, but this is our reality for the foreseeable future and we need the community's help in modeling and ensuring CDC and state guidelines are adhered to. Families must model appropriate mask wearing and social distancing protocols, as well, which includes limiting social interactions outside your home.

Staff will monitor student behavior and discipline issues in the same manner as in normal school operations.

## Why aren't we prioritizing children's education as highly as businesses reopening?

Providing a quality education to our students is the district's highest priority.

Remember that business reopening plans were conducted in a tightly controlled, phased-in approach with customer/employee safety at its core: the same priorities we are extending to our school reopening plan. The need to educate our children is THE priority for the district and the Learn from Anywhere plan is designed to address the needs of our students to meet them where they are and to ensure grade appropriate academic, social, and emotional growth.

## How will you ensure that teachers, working remotely, are also not caring for their children and are focused on their jobs?

We are all navigating through a global pandemic and being asked to work and live under extraordinary circumstances. Like any professional, teachers will be afforded flexibility to conduct their work as long as students are receiving the appropriate instruction. Some of the best lessons can be unscripted and unexpected and there are great lessons to be learned when students see adult role models caring for others.

## If the recommendation is to “wear a mask when unable to socially distance 6 feet” and everyone is going to be required to wear a mask in school, shouldn't they be able to go back to a regular school routine with minimal risk of spreading COVID-19?

No. Updated guidance from the CDC is that everyone should wear a mask in public settings and when around people who don't live in your household AND should distance at least 6' from other people. Additional guidelines from DESE require all students and staff to wear masks and for desks to be a minimum of 3' apart. Given this guidance, it is not feasible for us to return to a regular school routine.

Are teachers expected to cover -- and are students expected to achieve -- the same academic benchmarks in the 2020-2021 school year that existed at each grade level prior to the COVID pandemic, no matter what learning scenario Hingham is in at various points throughout the school year (hybrid, fully remote, etc.)? If not, why not, and what are/when will we know the revised benchmarks?

The academic benchmarks students are required to achieve are set by the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. We expect further guidance from DESE on appropriate academic benchmarks but the Learn from Anywhere model is designed to ensure our students will achieve academic, social, and emotional growth and progress appropriate for their grade level.