



HINGHAM PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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Dear Hingham Public School Community,

As 2020 comes to a close (finally!), I am thinking back on what a year it has been. Communities across the US and around the world have faced devastating losses, and we have all been forced to adjust how we work, how we educate, and how we maintain the important relationships that form the fabric of our community. For sure, what I think of most often is the impact the virus has had on our students, teachers, staff, families and administrators over these past ten months. In my three decades working in public school systems, the impact of the pandemic on our students stands out--the loss of our children's normal routine of being in school, hanging out with friends, and participating in extra-curricular activities has been very difficult to witness.

Though 2020 has been incredibly challenging, 2021 offers new hope. As we approach the new year, we remain committed to meeting the academic, social and emotional needs of our students and to the ultimate goal of increasing in-person learning for our students as safely and quickly as possible. To that end, I am pleased to announce the next steps in our ongoing reopening plan. Today, I will highlight the first three phases, but the planning for subsequent phases to expand the amount of in-person instruction for all students will continue after the holiday break through biweekly meetings with the administration, school committee and Hingham Education Association in the weeks and months ahead. Highlights of phase one, which will begin on January 11, include:

- All Kindergarten students begin attending in-person school five days per week (four hours/day).
- All 1st and 2nd graders begin attending school in-person on Wednesdays, with each cohort attending every other week.
- Middle and high school students will have the opportunity for more in-person instruction on an individualized basis, with priority given to higher needs students, as 6 foot physical distance allows.

Then, beginning as early as February 1, phase two will expand the in-person instruction for students in grades 1-5, specifically:

- 1st and 2nd grade students will attend school in-person five days per week (4 hours/day).
- 3rd, 4th and 5th grade students will attend school in-person on Wednesdays, with each cohort attending every other week.

Phase three will begin as early as March 1, and will allow students in 3rd, 4th and 5th grade to begin attending five days per week (4 hours/day). Additional information is available [here](#). Also, please look for more details about these opportunities for additional in-person instruction from your school principal by early January.

In order to begin phases two and three, we must meet a health target, which requires Hingham's COVID positivity rate to be in the "gray" or "green" zones. While we recognize that meeting these targets may seem hard to reach to some, I am confident that our community's collective commitment to wearing face masks, keeping socially distant and limiting in-person gatherings will allow us to meet this goal.

In a year that has been anything but "normal," the amazing members of our PTOs and our community have found creative ways to help bring our school communities together safely. This brief [video](#) highlights just a few of the bright spots throughout this very challenging year and reflects a community that, despite its challenges, can come together as one.

As you celebrate the holidays and enjoy a much deserved break, please join me in giving thanks to all of our teachers, students, support staff, custodians, families, and administrators who continue working tirelessly to help keep us moving forward.

Best wishes for a happy and healthy 2021,

Paul Austin, Ph.D.
Superintendent
Hingham Public Schools
