



HINGHAM PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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Dear HPS Community,

I hope this communication finds you and your families well in this new year. The purpose of my communication today is to offer some thoughts about the events that unfolded this past week in our nation's capital and to give you an update on COVID-19 in our schools. It has been a difficult week for us all, and the need for our community to move forward in unity has never been more important.

On Wednesday of this past week, we all became witness to what future historians may refer to as one of the darkest days in American history. The Capitol building was breached and the violence that ensued threatened our democratic ideals and process. The impact of the events this past week will be a point of discussion for the days and weeks ahead, and there is no doubt that at this very moment, our children are watching and looking to us to make sense of what is happening in the world around them. To this end, I ask that we all be mindful of how we discuss the events with each other and with our students. In a day that was otherwise filled with sadness, I was lifted as both the Senate and House returned to their chambers to do the work of the people, and in doing so protected the sanctity of our democratic process. The day must serve as a reminder of the essential nature of our work as educators, parents, and community members to promote civil discourse and collaboration.

Last year was difficult for us all both professionally and personally. The strain and stress of living through a global health emergency has exacted a toll on all us. I call for our community to move forward together. While we may disagree at times about how to do that best, let us model behavior that exhibits trust, respect and compassion toward one another. It may sound trite, but our ability to disagree strenuously without being disagreeable is a vital lesson for our children to bear witness to.

As a community, we must stand united against the senseless violence that we witnessed in our nation's capital. If you have students, colleagues, or are yourself struggling with these events, please reach out to members of the school counseling department and/or your building administrator to access support services.

The second part of this communication is an update on COVID-19 in our schools. As expected, the district, community, state and nation is experiencing a surge in cases following the holidays. I am asked on a regular basis if our schools will remain open or pivot to remote learning as

result of the surge. The decisions regarding COVID-19 are complex and the consequences potentially significant. Although the community has reverted to the “red” status, the majority of cases reported in schools appear to be originating from activity outside of schools. After consultation with members of the Covid Response Team, including our school physician, the Hingham Health Department, and school administrators, and in light of our implementation of COVID testing for staff this week, I believe that we should stay the course. This has not been easy on anyone, but I applaud our administrators, educators, support staff, students, and families who are making incredible efforts every day.

As we did when Plymouth River School had a small cluster of COVID-19 cases, we will continue to monitor our situation closely and take immediate action to protect the health and safety of everyone. In doing your part, I ask that you please continue to be vigilant by wearing your face mask, follow all CDC and DPH recommendations, and avoid large gatherings. Together, we will move forward safely, responsibly, and in the spirit of unity.

Respectfully,

Paul Austin, Ph.D.
Superintendent of Schools