



Administrative Proposal for Increasing In-Person Learning – March 15, 2021

Preamble

- The HPS Administration, HEA, and staff have been working collaboratively for many weeks to increase in-person learning for all students in the safest and most responsible manner possible. We are all fully committed to the safety of our students, staff, and operations of our school system.
- The proposal that I make tonight is a major step forward in the effort to increase in-person learning for all students and a return to normal, albeit a “new normal”, of operations. It has been a very long and difficult 12 months and I sincerely appreciate the incredible efforts of our staff, School Committee, students, and families in meeting the needs of our students. It is time to move forward and to get all our children back to school, full-time.
- We recognize how disruptive this past year has been for our students, families, and staff. We understand that no plan will universally satisfy all staff, families, or students. We are fully committed to moving forward with plans that provide the supports and services necessary to every learner in our district.
- Science supports that schools can be operated safely with proper mitigation measures such as wearing masks, handwashing, surveillance testing, and maintaining physical distance. These will remain in effect.
- Finally, I want to thank the members of both the HMS and HHS Advisory Committees for their work on getting our students back to school. Your input has been insightful, thoughtful, and very much appreciated in this process.

Why is change needed?

- Regardless of the quality of our online programming, nothing can replicate in-person learning for our students K-12.
- Isolation from peers and educators impacts the social and emotional well being of both students and educators.
- The longer we remain in hybrid, the greater the risk for academic regression.
- Students need to be in school every day.
- Teachers are in the process of becoming vaccinated and they want to teach their students in person.
- Families want to return to work
- COVID-19 in our community and schools is declining and science supports that schools can be operated safely with proper mitigation measures.
- The Commissioner of Education has ordered that all K-5 students attend school full-time by April 5, 2021, and that middle school students attend full-time by April 28th. The Commissioner has not determined when high school students would attend fully in-person.

Proposal: Discontinue the Hybrid Model in Grades 6-8

- **Phased-In Approach to Full In-Person Learning Model for grades 6-8**
- As previously determined...On March 17th, students will attend alternating Wednesdays for four-hour days (7:30 – 11:30) of in-person learning based upon cohort assignment. Blocks A through E will meet in-person, and most students will be dismissed at 11:30 to return home to participate in their elective classes remotely.
- On March 29, 2021, all HMS grades 6-8 students (non-remote) will attend school five days per week, for four and one-half hours (7:30 – 11:55). Blocks A through E will increase from 40 minutes each to 47 minutes each. Most students will be dismissed at 11:55am to return home to participate in their elective classes remotely during the afternoon as they do now. From this date forward, the District will ensure at least 3' physical distancing for all students at HMS.
- On April 26th, all HMS students will attend school five full days in-person. Lunch will be served. The day will run from 7:30am – 2:00pm. Blocks A – G will meet in-person, but some elective classes may need to be limited due to enrollment, which may result in individual schedule changes. You will receive details about the middle school schedule directly from building administration.
- The District will ensure that educators may maintain at least 6' physical distancing from students.
- To assist in planning, families will be asked to commit to in-person or remote learning for the remainder of the school year. This is intended to limit enrollment/classroom changes between in-person and remote learning students to the extent possible. Any changes after April 17th will be subject to space limitations and could take several weeks to implement.

Proposal: Discontinue the Hybrid Model in Grades 9-12

- **Phased-In Approach to Full In-Person Learning Model for grades 9-12**
- On April 5, 2021, all HHS grades 9-12 students (non-remote) will attend school five days per week on the current schedule (8:00 – 12:05). From this date forward, the District will ensure at least 3' physical distancing for all students.
- On April 26th, all HHS students will attend school five full days in-person. Lunch will be served. The day will run from 8:00am – 2:30pm. Overflow locations may be needed for some classes that cannot hold all students with 3' spacing. High School Administration is working on schedules now and you will receive schedule updates from building administration as soon as possible.
- The District will ensure that educators may maintain at least 6' physical distancing from students.
- To assist in planning, families will be asked to commit to in-person or remote learning for the remainder of the school year. This is intended to limit enrollment/classroom changes between in-person and remote learning students to the extent possible. Any changes after April 17th will be subject to space limitations and could take several weeks to implement.

Why a “Phased-In” Approach?

- The district wanted to move to five days per week as quickly as possible, but there are many details that still need to be worked out. Starting five days per week on the current schedule will allow us the time needed to work out issues with space, schedules, and providing lunch that will hopefully ensure a smooth transition to full days after April Vacation.
- Our students and staff need time to adjust to the “new normal.” School will not be just like it was prior to the pandemic for the foreseeable future, and we must all adjust.
- A phased-in re-entry will provide our students the opportunity to adjust to a five day in-person schedule. While most of our students have been attending at least 2 days per week since September, as many as 30% of high school students have been engaged fully remotely. The two/three-week phase-in period will ease the transition for students.
- In order to safely conduct classes and activities such as physical education, music, and lunch, we will likely need to use outdoor space frequently. By April 26th, we hope for warmer temperatures and better weather for those activities.
- Educators and staff have become eligible for the vaccine and are in the process of being vaccinated. It is our hope that by April 26th, most of our educators and staff will have received at least one dose of the Moderna or Pfizer vaccine or perhaps even be fully vaccinated with the Johnson & Johnson vaccine.

Challenges to Consider

- The requirement to maintain 3' between students in classrooms is a considerable challenge at both HMS and HHS. We are in the process of reconsidering measurements at both schools to ensure maximum space use, but we believe it is inevitable that we will have some classes where enrollment will exceed what we can hold at 3' spacing. Because of this, we are identifying "overflow" spaces for students to live-stream into the classes and we will have to rotate students in a fair way. We recognize this is not ideal but seems to be a fair tradeoff in getting our students back to school.
- Lunches will be a major hurdle to address. All students must be spaced at least 6' apart and facing the same direction. Lunch will not be the same social experience our students are accustomed to. With 900+ students at HMS and over 1,200 at HHS, this is perhaps our greatest challenge. We have ordered large tents (40 x 100) for both the middle school and high school that will each hold over 100 students each, but this will not completely solve the issue. We will have to use outdoor space, which we hope will not be a problem in warm weather, but inclement weather days will require additional indoor options. There will be more to come as the administration works through this very complex problem.
- Many of our elective classes will have strict requirements that we must abide by to ensure the health and safety of our staff and students. Music, physical education etc. may have to be altered in both time and space. While we will utilize outdoor spaces as much as possible, inclement weather days will make this more challenging. There will be more to come from building administration regarding these classes.
- We might have to add nursing staff to account for expected increases in contact tracing. Pool testing is an important tool for us to use to monitor the spread of COVID-19 among our students, but we have had relatively low "buy-in" from students to participate. We hope for increased buy-in as we move everyone into the buildings.

Lunch at HMS (approximately 120 student capacity)



Nothing is without Risk or Challenge

- Reducing from 6' to 3'- 6' physical distancing will increase the potential number of children and staff subject to quarantine, entire class quarantine, or perhaps whole school quarantine (pivoting to remote learning).
- Reducing from 6' to 3'- 6' physical distancing increases the risk of transmission in school. This will need to be monitored carefully via pool testing and contact tracing.
- We need commitment to the extent possible from families to test students regularly for COVID-19. This will aid the district in monitoring the prevalence of COVID-19 in our schools and community, allow us to isolate any known cases quickly, reduce the number of students and staff who may need to quarantine, and will help us keep schools open.
- Providing unmasked lunches and increased mask breaks (all at 6+ feet) could increase the transmission of COVID-19 in our schools. We will require strict adherence to all safety protocols (i.e., mask wearing, hand washing, physical spacing) to minimize risk for our school community.

Next Steps

- The working conditions impacted by these proposals are subject to Collective Bargaining with the Hingham Education Association (HEA). Working conditions must be negotiated in good faith and are subject to ratification by both the membership of the HEA and the full membership of the Hingham School Committee.
- We are currently meeting weekly with the HEA.
- Families will be surveyed this week to determine commitment to either in-person or remote learning and transportation needs. Transportation for high school is still not offered at this time, but we are considering for a later date.
- The HMS and HHS Advisory Committees will continue to meet to work through the issues associated with the return of students (e.g., lunch services etc.).
- Tonight, I am asking the School Committee for feedback and if you are so inclined, the Committee could formally vote to accept the proposal this evening.

Questions and Comments
