

November 25, 2020

Dear BPS Families,

We were excited to welcome back nearly 200 students to four special education-focused schools starting on November 16 at the Carter, McKinley, Horace Mann School for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, and Henderson Inclusion School. The return to in-person learning is critical for these students who require instructional support as well as services that are best provided in person, including physical and speech therapy, and access to multiple professionals at one time which is difficult on a screen.

We were able to return these students to school after review and approval from the Boston Public Health Commission (BPHC) and via an agreement with the Boston Teachers Union (BTU).

- BPHC [signed off on returning to buildings](#) based on the number of staff/students and types of contact between staff and students.
- BTU agreed to return to school buildings with a few additional safety measures instituted at the four schools, including:
  - adding free-standing air filters into occupied classrooms,
  - additional air quality testing and reporting,
  - access to COVID-19 testing for teachers and educators returning to buildings,
  - and the availability of additional medical-grade personal protective equipment (which is above and beyond what the public health experts recommend)

### **What's Next: Phasing in Students Identified as High Priority**

We know the best place for learning is in a classroom with a teacher. We have heard loud and clear that many parents and their students are ready to be back in school. Many students require in-person learning to progress and thrive. We too want them back. We know many families who requested hybrid learning are eager to have their child in the school building. That's why we initiated a task force made up of BTU members, parents, students, and district staff that has been meeting to help guide our decision making on a safe return to in-person learning for students identified as high priority first. **If your student is identified as high priority for in-person learning, you may be contacted by your school to confirm your interest in returning once permitted.**

Unfortunately, we are unable to provide a definite timeline for return just yet as the virus continues to spread within our community, but we are still asking for you to indicate your preference for in person or remote to better prepare for operations such as staffing, space needs, transportation, food and nutrition, and health and safety.

As of this writing, the majority of students will continue to learn remotely until community spread of the virus is reduced. We will announce the timeline and sequence for return as soon as we

have clearance to start welcoming additional students back into additional buildings, starting with our High Priority Students, then our youngest learners, and groupings of grades from there.

## Path to Reopening

BPS will follow the steps below as we continue our planning for reopening schools for additional students:

- School personnel may reach out to you to confirm your preference for remote and/or in-person learning.
- School Leaders meet with their teachers and staff to confirm building readiness for in-person learning, comparing the list of students whose families have selected hybrid learning with their classroom space to ensure safe distancing
- School Leaders and teachers identify the needed staffing levels to ensure students who are learning in person have access the right educators for their learning
- If needed, School Leaders work collaboratively with staff to submit a flexible schedule to the BPS/BTU Reopening Task Force for approval; approved plans get reviewed by legal/labor before submission to the Superintendent.
- All health and safety measures at the school site are put into place\*\* and must obtain sign-off from BPHC.
- The Superintendent approves as soon as the school plan has sign-off from BPHC.

**\*\*Note:** Because of the extensive work done over the summer to prepare buildings for students and staff, **not all schools will require** the additional measures added for the special education-focused schools mentioned above (i.e. medical grade PPE, air purifiers, etc.).

All plans for reopening buildings will be reviewed based on the process above and approved by me and BPHC, will include any additional needed precautions and will be communicated to families.

## New Public Health Metrics

As the COVID-19 epidemic evolves, the City has recognized a need to adapt and update the understanding of COVID-19 spread in the community. Mayor Walsh and Chief of Health and Human Services Marty Martinez announced the City is now going to be publishing a total of six key measures to provide the most current and comprehensive picture of the virus. The City's positivity metric will now be a hybrid one, reviewing new positive cases out of all tests during the time frame reported.

This change in methodology will depict recent positivity due to a tighter timeframe for testing and provide a *more accurate depiction* of unique new positives. The City previously only counted a person with a test once.

Along with the positivity metric, the City evaluates other metrics to gauge the spread of COVID-19 in our community and the impact on our ability to care for those who need it most: new positive tests for COVID-19 in Boston residents, number of COVID-19 molecular tests performed, COVID-19 emergency department visits to Boston hospitals, availability of adult ICU and adult medical/ surgical beds at Boston hospitals, and percentage of non-surge adult ICU beds occupied at Boston hospitals.

## COVID-19 Updates

BPS has experienced a total of 39 positive cases among all of our hybrid-learning students and staff, including 24 since we shifted to all remote learning. We are reporting updates on our website [here](#).

Because we have such a small number of cases per school site, we are unable to break down this number by students and staff or by school until there are more than five cases per school due to privacy concerns and to protect the identity of community members who test positive. As of this date, there are no schools in BPS with five or more positive cases, so we are reporting only the district total.

Also, we are only reporting on cases of students and staff who have been inside school buildings. We are not reporting on students and staff who have been fully remote all year, because our goal is to report on cases that would impact our in person health and safety.

We want families to feel secure in knowing that when there is a confirmed case, we do the following:

- BPS Health Services is called
- BPS Health Services collects the details and call the BPHC Infectious Disease unit
- BPHC conducts contact tracing using [CDC guidelines for close contact](#).
- BPHC contacts all identified who they believe are at risk for infection providing specific instructions on next steps which could include testing and quarantining
- School Leaders inform all who have been in the school building of the infection
- BPS Environmental Team conducts an additional cleaning/sanitizing/disinfecting of the building

I look forward to providing next week's update.

Wishing you and your family well, and a very safe and Happy Thanksgiving,



Dr. Brenda Cassellius  
Superintendent