December 8, 2020

Dear BPS Families,

I hope you all had the opportunity to reflect and give thanks during last week’s holiday. I remain deeply grateful for this entire BPS community.

Returning to In-Person Learning

As I noted in last week’s update, we are working towards a plan to return additional students into additional school buildings starting as soon as we can. We continued meeting last week with School Leaders, teachers, and leadership from the Boston Public Health Commission (BPHC) as well as Boston Public Schools (BPS) central office staff to finalize the timeline for returning the next group of students to in-person learning.

After the return three weeks ago of students to our special education-focused schools we plan to return the next group of students on Monday, December 14.

This will include students with complex disabilities and language needs who were identified as having high priority for in-person learning. We are communicating directly with those families in collaboration with their school leaders to outline next steps.

This group includes approximately **1,700 students across 28 schools** (including additional students to the Henderson School which opened three weeks ago). These plans are based on families who selected hybrid learning for their students and on each building’s ability to welcome students and staff back to in-person learning. We will add free-standing air purifiers into the school buildings without HVAC systems to promote airflow, as outlined below.

The schools where these students will return include:

1. Blackstone Innovation School
2. Boston Community Leadership Academy
3. Boston Green Academy
4. Boston International Newcomers Academy
5. Brighton High School
6. Charlestown High School
7. Community Academy of Science and Health
8. Condon K-8 School
9. Curley K-8 School
10. East Boston High School
11. Eliot K-8 Innovation School
12. The English High School
13. Excel High School
Next Steps for In-Person Learning

Planning continues for the next group of students to return and we will release that timeline for reopening all school buildings in early 2021.

Air Filters, Purifiers, and Tests

We have been working to maintain the readiness of our school buildings. We are using guidance from Harvard’s T.H. Chan School of Public Health Schools for Health report (click to download the report by providing a name and email address).

The guidance in the report outlines ideal air changes per hour (ACH) as the main measure for ventilation. According to the report, classrooms should see an ACH of 3 or above as an indicator of the type of air flow needed to prevent the spread of COVID-19 through the air. To reach optimal ACH in school buildings, we are upgrading filters in our buildings with HVAC systems and adding air purifiers in buildings without HVAC. We are expecting 5,000 air purifiers through a partnership with the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education and have an order for additional units from our vendor. We currently have 400 units in our warehouse.

BPS hired an independent contractor to test the air quality of the buildings where students are currently learning and will continue testing air in all buildings with students and staff in hybrid learning via our Environmental Services Team in collaboration with BPHC.

COVID-19 Updates

I would like to remind everyone to continue following public health guidance to prevent further spreading of COVID-19 within our city. That means wearing a mask, washing your hands, keeping a safe distance from others, and most importantly staying home when feeling sick. Please see the following links for testing sites across the City of Boston and throughout Massachusetts.
BPS reported nine new cases last week, bringing our total since the return to school buildings in October to 48 cases. Please note that since we still do not have any schools with five or more cases we are still only reporting in the aggregate. It’s also worth noting that while we have four school buildings with in-person learning in progress, many teachers and other staff continue to report to their buildings to share the day’s lessons with students who are learning remotely so any positive cases reported are not necessarily related to the buildings where in-person learning is taking place.

**Flu Vaccines**

Over the summer, the Massachusetts Department of Public Health announced new vaccine requirements for all current students in PreK - Grade 12 to receive a flu vaccine annually by December 31. I know a lot of School Nurses and School Leaders have been communicating with you directly but I am including this update here because getting a flu vaccine this year is more important than ever to protect our communities from the flu and help reduce the burden on our local hospitals responding to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Every school has a full-time nurse available for support should you have questions or concerns about the flu vaccine or other health issues.

**From our partners at BPHC:**

There are a variety of flu vaccination options available, most of which are completely covered by health insurance:

- Primary Care Provider: Most health insurance plans cover the cost of a flu vaccine from your primary care provider and require no co-pay.
- Pharmacies: Many pharmacies offer the flu vaccine at no cost to the patient. For pharmacies, we recommend that individuals call ahead to confirm availability and any required documentation.

If you do not have health insurance, or if co-pays are a barrier, we encourage you to call the Mayor’s Health Line at (617) 534-5050 or toll-free at (800) 847-0710. BPHC, through the Mayor’s Health Line, will be offering vouchers for free flu vaccines to uninsured or underinsured adults, which may be redeemed at any Walgreens pharmacy.

Thank you for your continued partnership and collaboration. I hope you and your loved ones are staying safe and healthy.

All my best,

Dr. Brenda Cassellius
Superintendent