August 17, 2020

Dear Boston Public Schools Community:

I am writing to provide you with an update on our fall reopening plans. Throughout the summer my team and I have been working to develop plans for a safe and successful start to the new school year. In all our planning we are prioritizing the health and well-being of Boston Public Schools (BPS) students, staff, and families.

Our team has been listening carefully to our families, teachers and many stakeholders as we’ve continued to identify our best way forward. As a result of this engagement process, we have determined that there is no one way that works for every family. We will need to be flexible and able to address the many complex needs of our community.

Earlier this summer, state officials announced that the typical 180-day student learning time requirements for the 2020-2021 school year would be reduced to 170 days. This would allow educators and staff extra time for training, and preparation for the unique circumstances of the upcoming school year. BPS is in the process of requesting that the school year begin on Monday, September 21 for grades 1-12 and on Wednesday, September 23 for students in pre-K and kindergarten. We will formally notify you of any changes to the calendar once the start date for the school year is confirmed.

State guidance also directed school districts to submit plans for the school year on Friday, August 14. As a result, BPS recently released the second draft of our reopening plan which includes critical updates and feedback from our teachers, school leaders, students, parents, and stakeholders. Changes from the first draft of the plan are highlighted in yellow, and we are actively working on translating copies of the plan in nine languages, which will be posted on bostonpublicschools.org/reopening as soon as they are completed.

Just as community input informed the first draft of our plan, it has also played a central role in this update. In addition to our virtual community meetings, the Boston Teachers Union and BPS formed task forces made up of teachers, school leaders, and central office leaders to collaborate and provide input to the second draft. Some highlights of the second draft of the reopening plan include:

- Increasing efforts to connect and partner with families to conduct virtual/live home visits and provide support with technology
- Accelerating learning due to lost time in school
- Designing the school day to meet the different needs of early childhood, elementary and secondary levels, regardless of the learning model
- Determining how we will best serve our students with disabilities and English learners

These task forces will continue to work together to ensure students are safe, cared for, and that we hold ourselves accountable so every student is successful and has an equitable and excellent experience.
While we have developed plans for both a hybrid model as well as all-remote learning, we have not come to a final decision due to the varied feedback we received and our desire to respect parent choice. We believe it is both necessary and right to prioritize the needs of our most vulnerable students, keeping equity at the center of our plans, reviewing how every decision affects our students with disabilities, economically disadvantaged students, students of color, English learners, and students whose circumstances require additional support.

We affirm that families, teachers, and staff are concerned about returning to school. We also affirm and recognize the unintentional consequences to prolonged absence from in person schooling on our neediest students. Their social and emotional, academic and lifelong success is dependent on us getting this right. The gaps in opportunity and access in our community existed long before the COVID-19 pandemic and it is our responsibility to urgently find new solutions to mitigate furthering those inequities.

Public health information will guide us to a final decision, because our top priority is keeping our community safe. We will soon reach out to families with a link to a personalized form for each student with questions about your preferred learning model, as well as your needs for yellow bus transportation this fall. Your responses will help us to support our families’ individual needs, and will also guide our continued planning.

Thank you for your partnership as we continue working towards a successful start to the new school year.

In unity,

Dr. Brenda Cassellius
Superintendent