



The Public Schools of Brookline
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TO: School Committee
FROM: Jim Marini, Interim Superintendent
DATE: February 18, 2021
RE: Proposal to Bring More Students Back from Hybrid Instruction to Full In-Person Instruction

As we worked to open school last September while grappling with health and safety issues related to COVID-19 (cleaning protocols, personal protective equipment, cohorting students, etc.), the district addressed three main concerns: ventilation in school buildings, social distancing, and remote learning. With guidance from the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE), advice from Expert Panel 4, and financial support from the federal government and the Town of Brookline, we did the following: addressed the ventilation issues in all schools, hired additional staff to accommodate social distancing in the K-8 schools, and opened the Remote Learning Academy to provide a fully remote option for students and staff. Once these items were in place, we opened schools running four different learning models.

1. **Fully in-person:** Students in BEEP and Kindergarten attend school in-person 5 days per week.
2. **Fully remote:** Students in grades K-8 attend school completely remote (approximately 700 students opted for this model).
3. **Hybrid 1-8:** Students in grades 1-8 are divided into two groups. Each group attends school in-person for two days and remote for 3 days.
4. **BHS Model:** High school students can attend school in a hybrid model (similar to grades 1-8) or completely remote. Teachers instruct all students simultaneously to ensure continuity of instruction and integrity of programs.

We believe our mitigation strategies of improved ventilation, staying home when feeling sick, washing hands, wearing masks, maintaining distance, and asymptomatic testing have been effective in containing the in-school spread of the virus. Since in-person school has begun, we have closely monitored positive COVID cases, conducted thorough contact tracing to track the spread of the virus, and, with the exception of 3 cases, have not found definitive evidence of in-school spread.

While we have continuously prioritized the health and safety of our community, the social emotional well-being of our students has also been of critical concern to us over the last several months. The extended period of hybrid instruction, with reduced in-person school interactions, has had a profound impact on our students. In addition, we know our students of color, those on IEPs, English Learners, and students from lower income families have been disproportionately impacted by the pandemic. Schools not only offer routine and structure, but also provide psychological, and in some cases physical, safety for our students. Social emotional functioning and academic functioning are inextricably linked. The professionals in our buildings are acutely aware that children need to be mentally, physically, and emotionally present in the classroom in order to learn. School teams, which include counselors, teachers and administrators, monitor students of concern and have been intervening with direct service, increased communication/touch points with students, connections to community services and supports, to name a few. The social emotional needs of our students will remain a concern after this year and we are currently reviewing our approach to providing mental health services to determine what additional services need to be in place to be sure we are prepared to support students as school fully reopen.

Proposal

Given how effective our mitigation efforts have been, and how impactful in-person school is for students, we will begin to return more students to full time in-person instruction starting with students in elementary grades. This proposal (with the exception of grade 1 on March 1) may require a reduction in the 6-foot distancing parameters.

Grade 1

- As has been previously announced, students in grade 1 will return from the hybrid model of instruction to a full in-person model, five days per week, on **Monday, March 1**.

Grades 2-5

- Students in **grades 2-5** will move from the current hybrid model to a full in-person model, five days per week, on **March 29, 2021**.

Grades 6-8

- Students in **grades 6-8** will **remain in the current hybrid model*** due to larger class sizes, space constraints, scheduling, shared staff, and health and safety guidance related to in-person Conservatory courses.

Grades 9-12

- Students in **grades 9-12** will **remain in their current model***.
- Since December, the high school has been carefully returning more students to in-person instruction four days per week (Cohort A) through direct contact with parents and students. BHS has made four sets of offers to students who need more support and would benefit from more in-person instruction and interaction.
- Beginning on February 22, BHS will prioritize the return of students in grades 10-12, and will reach out directly to families to let them know of these opportunities.
- It will be more challenging to bring 9th graders back to full in-person school at the Old Lincoln campus due to space constraints.

*While we are not able to offer dates certain for the return of students in grades 6-12, we have included them in this proposal so they can be part of negotiations with the Brookline Educators Union set to begin the week of March 1, 2021.