



The Public Schools of Brookline

Town Hall

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Ben Lummis

Interim Superintendent

May 7, 2020

Dear PSB Families,

I hope you are doing well and that you and your families are safe.

This is an incredibly challenging time for each of us, and we have all worked hard to reimagine our work and, at the same time, reimagine our lives. I remain impressed by the hard work and dedication of our community of educators. And I remain deeply, deeply appreciative of all that families are doing to support your children. I know that the extended closure and remote learning is asking so much of parents and family members.

I write today to provide a few updates on the remote learning guidance that we are using across our schools as we move forward together through the end of the 2019-2020 school year.

During the initial phase of school closure, schools and district leadership responded to immediate needs, providing guidance intended to support teachers and families with preliminary steps while we transitioned to remote learning. We focused on sharing resources and activities that students could do. We prioritized providing food and technology so all families could be assured of some basic needs and access to learning.

Over the past month, Brookline's educational leaders and family communities have had many conversations about what we hope to accomplish in this important time. As we continue to evolve our work, we recognize important shared values and realities across our district:

1. **We continue to operate during a devastating, historic pandemic health crisis. Physical safety and social-emotional health is paramount.** Our children, families, staff, and resident community members alike are experiencing this crisis very differently, and our more vulnerable community members are bearing the disproportionate brunt and negative impacts of this crisis: health impacts, working parents, food or financial insecurity, and the list goes on.
2. **Our most vulnerable students face the very real possibility of substantial educational losses** if we do not teach and support them in ways that allow them to engage and learn. Our more advantaged community members are likely to continue to have significant enrichment and advancement opportunities provided by their families. Inequity will increase if our public schools do not engage all learners in meaningful learning.
3. **We cannot “replicate” the classroom experience and relationships that our educators can build and support in our buildings; we are building new ways to connect.** Our educators and students alike are stretching and exploring new ways of engaging, connecting, and growing with and for our students. As a corollary, “remote learning” does not mean “unlimited screen time”—we are and must continue to provide a mix of learning opportunities for children.

4. **Children at different ages have very different needs.** We will experience differences across grade spans with respect to remote engagement and the balance of academic to social-emotional and other supports. Except for the youngest grades, we cannot expect parents to be primary providers of content.
5. **For children with special needs, differentiated support is even more critical.** Students on IEPs or who are English learners, for example, require additional supports and services that have never been delivered online in Brookline, and we are committed to working with our educators, specialists, parents, and educators in other districts who are all trying to figure this out together.
6. **Operational and budget challenges are real,** and as a public education system (not a private independent institution) we must be mindful of what is realistic as we imagine and plan any new efforts. We are also cognizant that we will not have plentiful resources in the fall to “catch kids up” on lost material, although we will do our very best.

As the length of this school closure has stretched from the “possibility” of a few weeks to the “reality” of 14 weeks, it has become clear that direct educator-student face time is necessary. While we are not requiring minimum standards, teachers and staff are continuing to adapt and work together with students in a variety of ways including synchronous and asynchronous teaching, small group work, 1:1 time with students who require extra support, meaningful feedback on student work, and office hours. We know students benefit from time connecting with and seeing their teachers, other educators, and related service providers. Students also need opportunities to access peer-group and partner-based activities on a regular basis.

Updates to PSB’s Remote Learning Guidance

Now that we will be out of our schools until the end of the year, we continue to build for the long term by providing further clarity for educators, staff, school leaders, and families in a number of key areas. These new updates were shared with staff last week and are being put into operation this week and next. They build on all that we have accomplished and our previous guidance:

- [Remote Learning Guidance 2.0](#) (April 5, 2020)
- [Remote Learning Guidance 1.0](#) (March 23, 2020)

The most important update we’re sharing today is that for every grade and for every subject, K-8, educators have identified the most essential learning expectations that should be taught district-wide for the remainder of the 2019-2020 school year.

These Common Learning Expectations are based on the existing PSB K-8 Learning Expectations and consist of a short list of learning priorities for the remainder of the school year in each grade and subject area. The Common Learning Expectations are intended as a guide to help prioritize teaching and learning goals under the context of our current constraints, and to help ensure that as many students as possible are ready to start of the next academic year. **They are not intended to dictate curriculum, activities, methods, or approaches.** As we do throughout the school year, the PSB encourages creative and innovative approaches to teaching and learning, both academic and social-emotional connections, that vary across classrooms and teacher teams.

In addition to the K-8 Common Learning Expectations, updates were finalized and distributed to all teachers last week in the following important areas:

- Remote Teaching and Learning Approaches
- BHS Common Best Practices
- Entering Buildings to Retrieve Belongings

- Helping Students and Families by Streamlining Communication, Assignments, and Resources
- Keeping Track of and Following Up with Students Who are Not Engaging
- Feedback on Student Work
- Progress Reports and Report Cards
- Parent/Teacher Conferences
- Recording Live or Synchronous Lessons

To review what has been shared, please visit [PSB's Remote Learning Family Resource Website](#). This website also has district wide information including learning resources, family resources, library resources, and tech support.

Moving Forward and Working Together To Improve

I urge you to realize that our work continues to evolve. The lessons, support, connections our educators are providing, and the number of staff working with students are categorically different than they were the first couple of weeks of the closure. And we need to continue to improve.

In Brookline, improvement comes from educators, staff, and school leaders working together day after day, week after week. This is the same approach we are taking now to strengthen our remote learning effort. Teachers and teacher teams are meeting numerous times every week, sharing what is working and learning from what doesn't. Guidance counselors meet with their peers across the district to problem solve how to connect with disengaged students. Principals, vice principals, and coordinators pay close attention to what teachers are doing and the type of work they are offering. Teacher colleagues, school and district leaders are supporting teachers with guidance, coaching, and examples from peers. Principals are meeting with their full faculty, teacher teams, and individual teachers to identify what is going well and what isn't. Principals have been meeting with each other and with my district leadership team three times per week to discuss what is going well, how to improve our work and to develop further guidance that will help teachers progress.

It takes a lot of time to become a great teacher. Our teachers have been launched into a new school environment that would have been inconceivable a few months ago. **Please remember they care a ton about your kids, so please talk to your children's teacher if something isn't going well. If issues persist, then please communicate with your school's principal.**

You can also help us continue to improve the work we are doing during this extended closure. In the coming days we will release a family survey designed to get input on how the extended closure is going. Please look for this survey towards the end of the week and complete it for each of your children.

Please also know that we continue to work through a long list of end-of-year issues. This includes, among other things:

- Plans for BHS and 8th grade graduations
- Revising the FY 2021 budget to reflect the pandemic's impact on the economy, Town and state resources
- Plans for summer academic and support programming
- Based on what is going well and needs to get better, planning now for scenarios we may face in September: full, partial, or no opening of school buildings

I spoke of civility when we first started this year. I said then, and still believe, that civility is about more than politeness. Being civil to one another means disagreeing without disrespecting, seeking common ground, asking someone how they are doing and taking a moment to really listen to their

answer, leaning in and supporting someone when they make a mistake, and making room for the quieter voices that are too often silenced in our community.

I urge us to practice civility even during the stress, fear, and anxiety we are experiencing during this time of great uncertainty. If there was ever a time that we needed a helping hand, a gesture of kindness, the benefit of the doubt, or words of encouragement, it is now. All of us: our children and students, our parents and community members, our family members, and our educators. We are all finding our way step by step, day by day and we all need this type of support.

I have enormous gratitude for our students, families, and staff and all everyone is doing to keep our lives moving forward. Thank you for changing and adapting and learning every day these new lessons that have come to our doorsteps.

With gratitude and deep respect for our entire community,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'BL' followed by a long horizontal stroke.

Ben Lummis
Interim Superintendent