

PSB 2020-2021 Reopening August 12 Recommendation School Committee Memo



August 12, 2020

Dear Members of the Public Schools of Brookline School Committee:

This evening, PSB Leaders will make our final recommendation on the reopening of schools for Fall 2020. After weeks of research, planning, feedback, and review with numerous stakeholders and constituents, the district recommends a **RemotePlus** plan that includes **a full remote start** to the school year **except for BEEP, Kindergarten, and PSB's most vulnerable students**.

We recognize that schools play a vital role in childhood development, and there is no replacement for the collaboration, high-quality teaching, and community that stems from having students spend time in classrooms with their peers and teachers. However, even with low rates of the COVID-19 virus affecting Brookline residents, it is clear from the recommendations of Expert Advisory Panel #4 and the Healthy Buildings Team based at the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health led by Dr. Joseph Allen, that we **should not bring students and staff back into classrooms without enhancement of indoor ventilation systems**.¹

Beginning the school year in a mostly remote model has never been our first choice. However, it is the only choice independent of changes to community spread, procurement delays, and other factors that might inhibit students and staff from safely entering the building. The remote model will also allow PSB the time it needs to modify our facilities so that it meets the health and safety standards recommended by Dr. Allen and the Expert Advisory Panel #4.

Ventilation Metrics

The Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health has recommended that all indoor rooms should meet at least one of two air ventilation targets through a combination of (a) fresh outdoor air, (b) recirculated air filtered at MERV 13 level or higher (for rooms with mechanical ventilation), and (c) use of portable air cleaners with HEPA filters:

- **OPTION 1: At least 5.0 air changes per hour (ACH) of clean air**—with the Healthy Buildings Team defining 4-5 ACH as “good,” 5-6 ACH as “excellent,” and 6+ ACH as “ideal”; **OR**
- **OPTION 2: At least 15 liters per second per occupant of clean air**, allowing for de-densification of occupancy of rooms that cannot fully meet the ACH-based target as a complimentary ventilation strategy.²

The PSB Operations Department has already begun to inventory classrooms, purchase appropriate portable air cleaners with HEPA filters, and are **prepared to have all BEEP, Kindergarten, and classes that will serve our most vulnerable students ready by September 16, 2020**. Classrooms for our youngest grade levels will be prioritized and PSB will bring grade levels back to in-person learning on a rolling basis when ventilation targets have been met. PSB Leadership commits to reporting out on progress towards these metrics at each standing School Committee meeting from August 12, 2020, until further notice. Please note that families who do not wish for their child to return to in-person learning will have the option to remain completely remote.

¹ DRAFT Memo from Panel #4 titled, *Panel Statement on Indoor Space Ventilation, August 12, 2020*

² DRAFT Memo from Panel #4 titled, *Panel Statement on Indoor Space Ventilation, August 12, 2020*

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Staffing and Enrollment

In order to bring all Kindergarten students back full time to in-person learning, and keep students and staff socially distant at 6 feet, we may need to split up Kindergarten classrooms. As of August 11, the enrollment of our Kindergarten population is 486 students. This number includes families who have pre-registered but does not include families who have not yet sent their intent to enroll information to the PSB Office of Registration and Enrollment (ORE).

Last year, 44 new Kindergarten students enrolled with ORE between July and September 2019. ORE does acknowledge new enrollment is lower than more typical years but anticipates some families are waiting to make a decision on enrollment pending the finalization of reopening of school plans. Other families may also be arriving in Brookline later due to a variety of travel restrictions and challenges in place.³ Once enrollment is finalized and families declare whether they want to keep their Kindergarten students in a remote setting, PSB will be able to determine whether classrooms need to be split. As much as possible, PSB will use existing employees to staff split classrooms at the Kindergarten level.

Remote Learning Academy

PSB understands that not all families will want their children returning to school buildings whether that is on September 16th or at a time when their classrooms receive the green light for entry. Given this, the district will send a form to all families of students in grades K-12 the week of August 17th with the option to select a “remote only” learning model for their child(ren).

Similarly, the district intends to send a form to all school-based staff that same week to identify staff for the RLA. This survey will also help PSB identify staff who **can** teach in-person and will be prepared for our BEEP, Kindergarten, and most vulnerable students on September 16th. Staff placed at the RLA are those unable to teach in-person due to personal health and safety reasons. **The Remote Learning Academy will begin on the first day of school (9/16) to ensure consistency for students.**

Outdoor Space

Although the majority of students in PSB will begin the year remotely, PSB school leaders will work with their staff to create scheduled and predictable outdoor in-person meetups at school buildings throughout the fall to the extent possible while the weather is nice. These meetups will primarily involve community and relationship building that will help connect students with peers and teachers with a focus on social-emotional wellness. When planning these meetups, school teams will pay special attention to health and safety requirements as well as the inclusion of student populations who either cannot physically get to the building or are reluctant to participate due to health and safety concerns. For this reason, schools will also continue to implement ways in which community and engagement can be built online.

For students beginning the school year in-person, outdoor breaks will be scheduled throughout the school day as deemed appropriate by school leaders and staff.

³ PSB Office of Registration and Enrollment, *Preliminary Enrollment Numbers Revised 8.12.20*

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Closing

As a community, we have worked tirelessly to create a reopening model that minimizes COVID-19 transmission risk in whatever way we can. I recognize that every family and staff member's circumstances are different, and no plan will ultimately satisfy everyone. Still, I genuinely believe meeting the clean air ventilation targets in classrooms while phasing our students into buildings is necessary to mitigate risk. The RemotePlus plan allows for PSB to open schools and for our students and staff to return to in-person learning when it is safe and beneficial to do so. In the meantime, we will remain vigilant in keeping our community healthy and working closely with our PSB staff, expert panels, and local and state departments.

Sincerely,

Dr. V. James Marini
Interim Superintendent