

General (Interim) Policy on COVID-Related Issues

The School Committee takes note of the COVID-19 emergency, the resulting disruption of the traditional school day and year, the growing concerns of students, families and the community, and the growing number of issues that will affect public education.

Therefore, the School Committee establishes this general interim policy on COVID-Related Issues to:

- promote the safety of students, faculty, and the broader community,
- maintain to the extent possible the high and efficient level of educational services,
- ensure support for students in general education and special education, as well as those at social and economic risk,
- comply with the emergency orders of the governor and adhere to the guidance of the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) and other agencies of state and federal government, and
- expedite safe strategies for returning students to school.

The School Committee will vote on the final plan submitted to DESE which will outline its strategy for returning students to school and will, in collaboration with the superintendent, make such modifications to the “back to school plan,” and district policy, and when necessary will vote on authorizing the superintendent to suspend, revise or create protocols to facilitate the safe return to school.

The superintendent will designate the appropriate staff members to oversee the safe administration of COVID-related policies during the period of the pandemic emergency and shall make such recommendations to the School Committee as needed.

The School Committee will authorize the superintendent to act expeditiously in executing the “back to school” plan in accordance with current law and regulations and will, where noted, vote when necessary on authorizing the superintendent to suspend, revise, or recommend policies, rules and protocols as needed to serve the best interests and safety of students, their families, and the community.

The “back to school” plan shall constitute the policy of the PSB during the pandemic emergency, and the superintendent shall exercise the authority provided in law to carry out the plan as needed.

- General district goals affected by the pandemic.

The superintendent, subject to a vote by the School Committee, may suspend or modify individual district policies to address the COVID-19 emergency as declared by the governor. Such suspension of policy shall expire by a subsequent vote of the School Committee.

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The goal of emergency pandemic policies shall be to:

- o ensure the safety and health of students, faculty, staff, and all persons who may come in contact with them;
- o provide the most effective educational services as possible to students under the circumstances;
- o authorize changes to operating protocols as needed to open and operate schools effectively from various venues or platforms;
- o conduct the policies and operational functions of the PSB as efficiently as possible;
- o allow the superintendent and staff to act quickly to carry out a “back to school” plan and,
- o facilitate the re-establishment of a safe and productive school day and year.

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- Student assignment to schools

Subject to guidance from the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education and a vote by the School Committee, the superintendent may suspend or revise the assignment of students to schools, including the assignment of new students for such a period as the emergency declaration is in force.

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- Subject to guidance from the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) and provisions of collective bargaining agreements, the superintendent may suspend or revise the school calendar upon a vote by the School Committee.

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- Class size

In order to maintain healthy, safe, and effective classrooms, the superintendent may suspend district policy on class size, subject to a vote by the School Committee and relevant provisions of the collective bargaining agreements.

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- Attendance

Subject to operative law and a a vote by the School Committee, the superintendent may suspend, modify or adapt procedures related to student attendance.

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- Time on learning

Subject to operative law, regulations, guidance from the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) a vote by the School Committee and relevant provisions of collective bargaining agreements, the superintendent may suspend or amend requirements for time on learning for the duration of the COVID pandemic.

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- Grading and retention

In accordance with guidance from the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE), the superintendent may propose, subject to a vote by the School Committee, modifications to the policy of the district for grading and retention of students.

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- Local graduation requirements

In accordance with guidance from the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE), modifications to current regulation or law, and a vote by the School Committee, the superintendent may propose modifications to the policy of the district regarding graduation requirements.

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- Special education _____

_____ The superintendent and School Committee shall be mindful that attainment of a high school diploma may render certain students ineligible for further services.

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- Discipline and Suspension/Expulsion

The “back to school” plan recommended by the superintendent, subject to a vote by the School Committee, shall contain protocols for serving all students who are disciplined or suspended during the pandemic emergency.

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- Exemptions for particular groups of students (i.e., use of masks for youngest children, high risk students)

The superintendent shall provide protocols to principals and educators regarding students who may require special exemptions from health and safety standards during the pandemic emergency.

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Further, the superintendent shall provide in these “back to school” plans provisions for students who were disciplined or suspended, or who may elect to remain at home under the provisions of the policies related to home schooling, or who may elect remote learning in the interests of safety or health concerns.

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- Job descriptions _____

The superintendent may revise job descriptions for district staff, subject to a vote by the School Committee and relevant, provisions of current collective bargaining agreements, in order to secure the safety and health of students and staff, establish effective communications between school and community, maintain facilities, transport students as needed, provide food services, and acquire necessary materials to operate schools safely and securely during the pandemic. The superintendent will inform the School Committee of any proposed changes. Any changes to job descriptions shall expire upon a vote by the School Committee.

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- Students at Risk

During the COVID pandemic, the superintendent or principal of a school may revise or suspend provisions of policy to facilitate the education of students at risk or with special needs consistent with law and regulation, subject to a vote by the School Committee.

- Privacy of Students.

During the pandemic, the rights to privacy held by students and their families shall not be abridged by the PSB. Such rights extend to the confidentiality of student academic records, health data, economic status, and other such information as may be considered confidential by law.

Massachusetts law prohibits the recording of individuals without their permission. Similarly, students may not be recorded in classrooms by audio, visual, or remote means without the permission of parents or, if of age, by individual students. During periods of remote learning, the privacy of students participating in on-line classes shall not be violated by recording them without appropriate permissions.

- Pivoting back to remote learning, or back to in-school instruction

The superintendent shall incorporate into the “back to school” plan protocols for modifying these plans including addressing the needs of students who may require reversion from in-school to remote learning modalities because of the pandemic emergency.

- Home schooling (temporary), home-bound instruction (e.g., students with physical disabilities) and remote instruction for students in quarantine

The “back to school” plan shall provide for students who are temporarily homebound due to illness, quarantine, or disability.

- Public Safety Officers, including the school resource officer _____

Subject to current law or regulation, the superintendent shall report to the School Committee any changes in status of the school resource officer(s).

- Eligibility for participation in extra-curricular activities, including sports

Subject to law, regulation and standards established by the appropriate and legitimate regulatory body, the superintendent may propose changes to district protocols for participation in extracurricular activities including sports subject to the rules established by the Massachusetts Interscholastic Athletic Association, and by a vote of the School Committee.

- Attendance vs. participation in events

Subject to law, regulation or emergency declaration, the superintendent may propose protocols or modifications or suspensions of district policies regarding attendance by students or the public in school events including, but not limited to assemblies, sports events, large gatherings, or other programs.

- Visitors in schools and buildings _____

Subject to current emergency declarations and a vote by the School Committee, the superintendent may propose suspension or modification to district policies regarding visitors to school buildings during the school day and after school hours.

- Illness and contact tracing

Subject to the provisions of the “back to school” plan, the superintendent shall establish protocols for tracking student contacts as a means of locating others from whom students may contract or expose other persons to the COVID-19. Such protocols will be consistent with law and regulation and be consistent with standards to protect the privacy of students, their families, and other persons.

- Transportation and busing

Subject to current law and regulation, the superintendent may suspend or modify policies related to the transportation of students by the school district, subject to a vote by the School Committee. Legal requirements relating to IEP’s that contain transportation for students shall not be altered without the appropriate family consent. These modifications shall be consistent with the district “back to school” plan.

- Operations and plant maintenance

Subject to the provisions of law, regulation, a vote by the School Committee and relevant collective bargaining agreements, the superintendent may suspend or amend current policy to ensure the efficient operation of business functions and maintenance of school buildings and other such offices as the district maintains.

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