

The Public Schools of Brookline
School Committee Meeting of Thursday, April 16, 2020
Superintendent's Update on COVID-19 Extended School Closure
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Interim Superintendent of Schools

We continue to make progress step by step, day by day, and week by week. I am confident that our teachers, our teacher teams, and our school leaders are working together to get better at remote support, community building, and teaching. All of this continues to be a work in progress and our principals, vice principals, and coordinators are reporting that folks are making progress every day.

In the past week we have seen more collaboration between specials teachers, specialists, paraprofessionals, and general education teachers in support of our students. For example:

- Reading specialists, math specialists, and English language teachers are now ramping up small group work with students. In addition, they have been supporting general education teachers by creating videos with them and for them, and have been participating in morning meetings.
- We launched Enrichment, Challenge & Support, and [Music](#) resource websites that are available to teachers and to families as additional supplementary learning opportunities beyond what music or classroom teachers are already providing.
- Special education paraprofessionals are helping by connecting with students in community meetings, recording directions on assignments, and also connecting with students in groups and one on one.
- Literacy coaches are also video recording mini-lessons that other teachers can use.
- Principals, Ed Tech specialists, Scott Moore, and colleagues are supporting teachers who aren't yet comfortable with the technology by helping them get online and by recording videos with them or having virtual class sessions with them so that they become more comfortable with technology.

Supporting Students Who Aren't Engaging

As you know in our guidance to all staff, we provided guidelines about steps to take when they see students who they are not engaging. We are now doing this in a variety of ways across our schools including:

- At BHS – they have shifted COVID Struggling Students tracking so they know which students may be disengaging because of health related matters.
- K-5 classes are typically monitoring engagement for themselves as they are the primary connection to students and their families. Teachers will make individual outreach first.
- Middle grade level teams are typically keeping track at a grade level team meeting and documenting engagement, participation, and/or assignment completion
- Typically each grade level team meets with their admin team weekly and reports out on any students who are not connecting or engaging. Guidance Counselor, VP, or principal would then reach out to these families and can pull in social workers or the School Support Team

Ongoing Areas of Improvement

There are a few areas we have to continue to focus on that I am highlighting tonight:

1. Clarity and Coordination
2. Becoming more systematic and less dependent on individual or team heroics
3. Middle grades engagement

1. Clarity & Coordination

There is generally very strong collaboration on teacher teams – grade level teams at PK-8, subject area teams at 6-8, and department or course level collaboration at BHS. We need to move toward better coordination on two levels:

- a) Coordination of all the different pieces and people that are in play now - small group support, specials instruction (meaning art, music, PE/Health/Wellness and also World Language), special education, English learner education.
- b) Coordination for students/families – which stems from coordination of staff support, teaching – How do we help students (and parents/guardians) know where to go to get the information about learning, schedule, class meetings, assignments, etc. in an organized way rather than trying to piece together multiple websites, emails etc.

Our best examples of coordinating for K-8 students are the [weekly learning plans](#) that have daily schedules for the content, lessons, and engagement in each subject area and then link directly to the lessons and learning opportunities in art, music, health and wellness, and world language.

Another way that schools have been helping students and families stay organized is with their school-based Remote Learning hubs that link to each of their grade levels or classrooms where students go to get the information they need for their class. 8 of our 9 schools have these fully operational and the 9th one is working on it now.

2. Becoming More Systematic

We need to continue to think about the long term and how we keep from burning our people out. One way to prevent burnout is to not have every teacher or teacher team make everything up from scratch.

- a. This begins with the work underway on identifying common learning expectations by grade and subject area for K-8. The coordinators have been developing these based on our essential learning standards and any common curriculum we have in place. The Working Group led by Dr. Nicole Gittens has been reviewing these and providing feedback. We expect to have a majority of these finished by the end of the week, after which we will share them with teachers.
- b. We are also moving towards developing model or sample lessons, lesson templates, resource repositories by grade and other barriers to implementation the working group is addressing.

3. Engaging Middle Grades Students

One of the biggest challenges our teachers are facing is connecting with and engaging with middle grades students. This includes getting students on the virtual classes or community check-ins as well as work completion. Our schools which are tracking engagement in the middle grades report between 30% and 50% participation and work completion. In addition to ongoing

outreach, principals and teachers have started being clearer about which work and activities are required and which are optional or for an additional challenge.

In a moment you'll get an update from Deputy Superintendent Casey Ngo-Miller who will provide an update on Special Education supports and Related Services followed by an update from Dr. Nicole Gittens on the work of the Curriculum Coordinators and the Working Group that has been meeting this week.

Before that, I have four quick updates from the superintendent's call with the Commissioner of Education I want to update you on.

- Governor Baker is expected to make an announcement next week about extending the school closure. We do not have any information on what that announcement might be.
- Depending on the Governor's announcement, the Commissioner of Education and DESE are expected to release further guidance on the closure.
- MCAS has been cancelled for grades 3-10. They are still considering specific tests at the high school level.
- The deadline for submitting the Student Opportunity Act plan has been extended to May 15th at the earliest.