

FALL RIVER PUBLIC SCHOOLS

"The Scholarship City"

417 Rock Street, Fall River, MA 02720

Matthew H. Malone, Ph.D., Superintendent

July 28, 2020

Dear Fall River Public Schools Community,

I hope this memo finds you healthy, well, and enjoying the summer break. If we have learned anything from this COVID-19 experience, it is to cherish our loved ones and not take our time for granted. So please take the time for self-care and for investing in moments with your family, friends, and loved ones. As you are well aware, the school year did not end as it should have and one thing I am clear about is that the new school year will look different-different than anything we have experienced in the past. As such, as we prepare to reopen our schools for the start of 2020-21 school year on September 1, 2020, there is some important information I would like to share with you.

By now, many of you know that the Commissioner of Education has tasked each district in the commonwealth of Massachusetts with preparing three plans for the reopening of schools: full reopening with in-person face-to-face instruction, a hybrid model which includes some form of alternating face-to-face instruction with virtual learning, and a fully virtual learning model. On July 20th, I presented our School Committee with an initial draft reopening plan in-line with the state guidance and the detailed recommendations of our Reopening Task Force. You can reference the draft plan on our website by clicking [here](#). As we have continued to refine our planning, I have also initiated a local stakeholder community feedback committee and will continue engagement with SEPAC and ELPAC group conversations in the next week or so. Our planning process is intense, guided by research, science, best-practice, state guidance, and local input from our practitioners within our schools and the parents/families that we serve.

The FY21 Massachusetts budget has not yet been approved. As such, we have had to make difficult budgetary decisions in order to prioritize a fully-staffed level service budget to reopen schools. On Wednesday June 24, 2020, after a great deal of deliberation and analysis, the Fall River School Committee voted to eliminate ELT at the three 90 minute schools-Kuss, Silvia, and Viveiros, in addition to Doran School. As you are all aware, we are still waiting for the budget to be resolved and it was not fiscally sound to anticipate funding those schools. The three 90 minute schools are funded by a state grant, which is yet to be approved and Doran is funded through our district's operating budget. The elimination of ELT was a difficult decision but it also signals our district and school committee's commitment to preserve a level services budget. Our proposed new school start/end times and new 2020-21 school calendar will be presented to the School Committee on August 10th, the same night we propose a more detailed reopening plan based on the 1st draft.

Once our district-wide reopening plan is finalized, our building principals will work with their site-level teams (supported by district administration and staff) to prepare for site-based reopening plans that are centered on the safety and well-being of our students and staff and specific to individual school needs. Concurrent with this, we will continue to answer questions and address the concerns of our parents/families and our employees.

We believe that it is imperative that your voice is heard; your input is critical in informing, planning, and shaping our decision-making process. To date, we have conducted a telephone survey to ask you to weigh in on your child's Remote Learning experience and we appreciate your feedback and participation in this. On Thursday, July 30th, we will send out a new more detailed survey to parents/families and to employees in order to gather more data regarding our school reopening planning. Specifically for parents, we will ask questions about your thoughts in regards to sending your child back to school for in-person face-to-face learning or if you would prefer a fully remote virtual learning model. We will also ask you about your technology and internet connectivity capacity at home, the type of hybrid school reopening model you would prefer to begin the year with, and whether you intend to transport your child to school or use bus transportation if your child is typically assigned to a bus. These are very important questions that you need to think about and then provide your most up-to-date informed response. Our employees will receive a survey that asks them about their technology usage and their thoughts on our draft phased-in hybrid reopening plan.

We recognize that many of you will still be undecided about reopening but it is important for us to know where you stand at this moment in time. You can expect us to send out another survey in early August as we continue to gather more accurate information from you once our reopening plans become solidified.

Please know that your feedback IS always appreciated and you can contact me via phone or email at your discretion. The keyword for our reopening planning is “flexible” as new information and guidance is disseminated and medical advice regarding COVID-19 evolves, we have to be flexible in our planning to handle any contingency or scenario. We will be ready and we will be prepared to open safely and compassionately in order to meet the needs of the students we serve, the families we have partnered with, and the employees who we entrust with delivering the education and care to the children in the Fall River Public Schools.

Friendly Reminders:

Summer Assignments: Although summer is here, more than ever, it is important that our children stay connected to learning. We intentionally allowed students to hold on to Chromebooks so that they could use them to extend their learning. Summer assignments are posted on each of our school websites. If you would prefer paper copies of your child’s summer assignments, please call the school. I encourage you to work with your child/children at home using both the on-line resources we have for your use, plus doing other learning activities of your own design and device that gets kids outside, exploring nature and the built environment, and experiencing new opportunities to grow and develop. Most importantly, please read with your kids. There is nothing better than reading to develop vocabulary and comprehension skills that will open new horizons for accessing information and meaning-making.

Preparing Children for Fall: In anticipation of our return, it would be great for parents to start preparing students for a different return. For example, students will be required to adhere to social distancing guidelines. They will also be wearing masks and sanitizing hands often; please practice with them. Instill in them those good habits that will protect not only their own health but the health of their friends, teachers, and families. These safety precautions are non-negotiable so we need you to help us prepare your children with the new standard operating procedures.

Finally, these are challenging and uncharted times, I know you have experienced fear and anxiety regarding the pandemic and the great unknown answers to the questions you have been asking. Not having all of the answers up-front and living with greater ambiguity has not been the norm for us as a nation. We need to accept this and understand that it’s ok, we can certainly continue to work as a team, to problem-solve, to communicate, and to support one another through the greatest challenge of the 21st Century – the COVID-19 Pandemic. We must be calm, we can be compassionate, we must be sensible – in other words, we must be human – to successfully navigate the bumpy road ahead. I commend all of you for all that you are doing to support your children, support your family, and to support our schools during the past five months. Please, I ask that you continue to be patient as we ALL work together to create a reopening plan that is safe, thoughtful, practical, and driven by common-sense. We can, and will be, successful in our collective efforts to reopen our schools for learning.

Cordially,



Matthew H. Malone