MATTAPOISETT SCHOOL COMMITTEE MATTAPOISETT SCHOOL COMMITTEE MEET January 11, 2021 at 6:30 p.m. MEETING HELD REMOTELY THROUGH ZOOM Mattapoisett, MA 02738

Members Present: James Muse, Carole Clifford, Shannon Finning, Carly Lavin and Karin Barrows.

Members Absent: NONE

Others Present: Michael S. Nelson, Superintendent of Schools, Jannell Pearson-Campbell, Asst. Superintendent of Teaching & Learning, Howard Barber, Asst. Superintendent of Finance & Operations, Craig Davidson, Director of Student Services, Diana Russo, Administrative Asst. to the Supt, Kevin Tavares, Associate Principal, Mattapoisett Public Schools, staff, parents and members of press.

Meeting was called to order at 6:35 p.m. by Chairperson Muse. Mr. Muse read the following statement: This meeting will be conducted in a hybrid format. School Committee and Administrators will have the option of meeting in person at ORR Jr. High School, Media Room, 133 Marion Road, Mattapoisett, MA 02739 or via zoom. Public Access is available through zoom only through the link above. Mr. Muse also reported that all school committee members were participating remotely through zoom at this meeting.

Mr. Muse expressed that there will be a period for the public to participate in open comments. Mr. Muse expressed that the period for open comments will be 20 minutes and each speaker will have 3 minutes to speak. Mr. Muse expressed that the 20 minutes would not be exceeded. He reminded the public if they have already spoken regarding a particular issue and they don't have anything new to add he requested that they not request to speak and give others who haven't spoken a chance to express their views. Mr. Muse asked the public to only address comments being made to items that are on the agenda. He reminded the public not to make defamatory or insulting comments about anyone he expressed that if that does happen the person will be muted and not allowed to speak further. Mr. Muse asked everyone to be patient during this difficult time. Mr. Muse expressed that last but certainly not least he wanted the public to know that the school committee appreciates all the comments, written statements, sent emails, he assured everyone that they are all been received and considered and they will impact the deliberations that every member of this committee make tonight. Mr. Muse expressed that the school committee have the best interests of the students and the staff in their thoughts when any vote is taken. Mr. Muse expressed that usually the open comment period is held prior to starting the regular meeting, however there has been prior discussion about moving the open comment period to another time during the meeting. Mr. Muse asked if any member of the committee wanted to make a motion to move the open comment period to another time. No motion was made at this time.

Ms. Lavin expressed that as a member of the Joint Labor Committee that tonight there would be no reason to change the open comment, she expressed they would probably be beneficial both at the beginning and at the end. Ms. Lavin thanked Mr. Muse for the opportunity to make the change. She expressed that if it's warranted maybe another opportunity could be given at the end.

Mr. Muse expressed that per policy there will be one open comment period, it would either be now or at the end of the meeting. Mr. Muse expressed that he is willing to adjust the agenda.

Ms. Russo will call their name, and each person will have 3 minutes to speak. Mr. Muse explained that when the speaker has 1 minute remaining Ms. Russo will hold up a "1 minute remaining" sign.

OPEN COMMENTS

Elizabeth Sherri: Ms. Sherri expressed that as a consequence of having the K-2 students go to school full in-person my daughter has lost her remote learning teacher. She expressed that they were given no warning that this would happen, she expressed that this was a devastating blow to our daughter and our family, she expressed that they trust Ms. Maloof and our attempts from preventing this from happening have been largely ignored. She expressed that she feels this is very insulting to remote families who have lost their teacher without warning and against our will and we have not had any opportunity to make public our concerns until today when the proposed plan has already been enacted, she expressed that she has spoken to school committee and administrators and she's yet to receive an explanation to why this decision was made without any warning to remote families. She expressed how can this be explained as an equitable learning experience if my daughter is having to be reassigned to a new teacher. She expressed that the pandemic isn't over yet, and that our teachers haven't had the chance to be vaccinated and despite the fact that there have been over 110 reported cases in district since we started school the needs of the high risk population of our community are not properly addressed. Our concerns are the most vulnerable members of our families, for the hundreds of people who work in the school district has been belittled as fear mongering and my daughter's education and well-being are being treated as an afterthought. She expressed this is not an equitable, we should have been warned about the drastic changes, there should have been alternatives and we should have had the opportunity to address our concerns publicly before tonight.

Benares Angeley made the following statement:

Thank you school committee members and Superintendent Nelson for listening tonight. As always, thank you to our teachers for consistently going above and beyond their job description to educate and keep our children safe during a worldwide pandemic. With 375 thousand deaths in the United States and over 13,000 deaths in our Massachusetts, we know that concern over safety during this pandemic is not fear-mongering, rather, it is an intentional and rational response to a worldwide health crisis. I know that the safety of our students and our teachers and staff is of the utmost importance to this entire community, my many concerns regarding a full time return to school for grades K-2 are condensed into one question---what's the rush?? While we ALL want children to return to school, we must only do so after our teachers and staff are vaccinated, or when the infection rates in our town are sufficiently low enough to merit a return. With vaccinations in sight, I ask again---what is the rush? Alongside safety, I am also concerned about the equity of the proposed return. There are students who rely on assistance from our reading specialist--a position that no longer exists. Especially for third graders who are required to take the MCAS this year, this is an enormous loss, not to mention students in other grades who receive this service. Remote learners have taken the biggest hit in this process. Many remote learners have medical conditions that prevent them from attending school. For them, this is not so much a choice, but a necessity. Yet they have lost their teacher-the teacher they relied on, the teacher that helped to create a classroom community for them. This is no small matter; remote students must be provided the same level of quality education as all our students should receive. I know that many parents in our community are feeling at odds with each other. I also know that we all want to be good parents and we want to raise our children to feel safe and secure and to take care of each other. Let's take a collective deep breath--pause--don't rush--and take the time to fully listen to each other in community wide discussions before jumping into a full return decision. Thank you for your time tonight.

Todd Phillie: Mr. Philie stated the following:

Dear Mattapoisett School Committee members, several parents have been discussing return to school plans and many of us have similar questions and concerns. Most of us do not argue that the students need to return full time, however it's the timing of the return that concerns us. We would like to wait out the holiday surge and wait for staff vaccinations before returning to school full time Safety, equity and communication are the three topics. Safety, when children go to school it's the school's responsibility to keep them safe, it's also the school's responsibility to keep the staff safe, what is the board of health metric for full remote vs. full in-person, what metric will be used to send grades 3-6 back full time? As the school committee and the board of health determine the metric for full in person learning?

Security: The third graders will be exercising in their classrooms on bad weather days, the CDC in October of 2020 indicated that the 6-foot rule would be less effective in circumstances where there is poor ventilation. There are security issues in Mrs. Hughes classroom which will be in the music room hallway because it has access from the Council on Aging, the same security measures currently at the main office need to be installed prior to the return to school.

Equity, while we believe the K-2 is the most vulnerable in terms of literacy we are uneasy that the changes made to accommodate these students are having a negative impact on grades 3 through 6. Staying with the current hybrid learning model allows the kids to have the freedom of movement, fresh air and learning. The 3rd grade and Mrs. Hughes 1st grade classroom will now have to stay in their classrooms all day for lunch, gym on bad weather days which allows for very little movement, this is not conducive to learning. How is the school going to protect students from allergens in the classroom, peanut allergies? Many families agree that sending children two days per week is the safest choice and solution to learning, especially with the daily increases happening in our community. The last survey never asked about continuing with the hybrid model, why is this not an option, parents were only asked about full in person and remote learning. Surveys need to consider all aspects of the learning models instead of being guided in one direction. Parents with two or more children in different will be affected with transportation issues by having to drop off a child K-2 and then having to leave another child at home to attend a zoom meeting without a parent or guardian. The home to school communication needs to be more uniform and regular, please consider regular zooms for parents to check in with questions, this will eliminate a lot of rumors and misinformation. We would like an email from administration describing the full plan, a zoom meeting, a Q&A about the plan, a survey about the plan and approval by the school committee only after the previous communications have taken place. We thank you for your service to the students and families of Mattapoisett. Thank you for listening.

Frances Kearns:

Ms. Kearns reported that her children attend Old Hammontown School and they are currently in the remote learning model. She expressed that she also has concerns about access to teachers in terms of equity, she expressed that they currently don't have access to their gym, library and music teacher that loss occurred a couple of weeks ago and right now there hasn't been replacement for some of those specialists. She expressed that her concern is that remote learners need to be offered the same learning opportunities as hybrid learners. Ms. Kearns thanked the school committee for their time.

Eileen Newell:

Ms. Newell reported that she is fully endorsing the return of the students she wanted to thank the administration and the teaching staff for literally grabbing the ball and running with it since the December meeting and doing what the majority of the community expressed a desire for, a real plan

of action and delivering it on a timely manner. Ms. Newell stated "Thank you for that". She expressed she is a kindergarten teacher outside of this district and she teaches 21 fully remote students and she realizes she's preaching to the choir with all the teachers on this zoom, she stated "let this sink in for a minute, I have 21 5 and 6 year olds on the computer for 6 ½ hours a day and I deliver 4 hours of live instruction daily, that is a huge order, and the fact that we have the opportunity for our students to go back into school full time at 6 feet is such a luxury, this offers a remarkable opportunity for the teachers of Mattapoisett to have the ability to deliver the quality inperson instruction that our children deserve". She expressed that this is a true win for our town and our children, which is a testament to the commitment of the school committee, the administration, the teachers, and the town.

Cristin Cowles: Ms. Cowles expressed that she wrote a letter to school committee and she hopes that some will be answered during the meeting, but she did have one that she thought was important for the discussion, what metrics will be used to send the rest of the children back to school? She expressed that she's a parent of a third grader and she doesn't argue that is important to for K-2 students to go back but she expressed that the third grade students and parents are feeling very left out. Therefore, I'm hoping to hear what metrics will be used to send all students back full time, she expressed that other districts have done it so it is possible. "Thank you."

Sara Jacobsen: Ms. Jacobsen introduced herself has Co-President of the MEA, a 6th grade teacher at Old Hammontown School and also a mother of a third grader in Mattapoisett, she expressed that to Ms. Cowell's point she is facing a lot of flak from her 3rd grader given that she is part of the planning for bringing back the students in grades K-2. Ms. Jacobsen expressed that that one of the messages that she had for her was that when you are part of a community you try to do things for the benefit of every member of that community, even when there are substantial individual costs, and unfortunately right now with the nature of the pandemic no one is getting their needs met, not staff not students no one in our community can get everything they need, she expressed she wishes she could get a vaccine and she can't get one because there's not one available to her. She stated that what she would try to express to her daughter is that someone else getting a vaccine is still good for me, because I'm part of a community, and someone else getting more in-person education is still good for her even though she's going outside to do gym. She expressed that they have talked a lot about equity the past few months and we need to think about the true meaning of that word, she expressed that as we are having these discussions, they are very privileged discussions, she expressed that in Worcester there's an entire city of children who have not set a foot in a building since March. She expressed that if we are committed to equity among children it can't just be the children of Mattapoisett, equity means that we all do everything possible to stop the spread of this virus, and one of things that my colleagues have recently referenced is if there were a collective commitment to stop the spread of this virus within our town all of our school reopening would be in a better place, she expressed that they have not seen the same level and the same commitment to stop the spread of the virus that we have seen to other discussions. She expressed that we are asking that we talk about equity that we consider that the most important thing we can do for equity is far beyond just the limited boundaries of Mattapoisett and when we do everything we can to stop the virus from being transmitted that benefits every child. She expressed that every person is served when we commit to stop the spread of COVID. "Thank you".

I. Approval of Minutes

1. REGULAR MINUTES:

Motion to approve the minutes of December 7, 2020 as amended MOTION by Ms. Lavin SECONDED by Ms. Barrows

ROLL CALL VOTE:

5:0 (Muse: yes, Lavin; yes, Clifford: yes, Finning; yes, Barrows; yes)

3. BUDGET SUB-COMMITTEE MINUTES

Motion to approve the minutes of December 10, 2020 as amended MOTION by Dr. Finning SECONDED by Mr. Muse ROLL CALL VOTE:

2:0 (Muse: yes, Finning; yes)

V. General

A. Update on Reopening Plan/Joint Labor Management Committee Update

Superintendent Michael Nelson made the following statement:

Good Evening Everyone,

Mr. Muse I'd ask for Emily Field the Mattapoisett Town Nurse and Associate Principal Kevin Tavares to join me in this presentation. At our last school committee meeting on December 7, 2020 the school administration presented two options for the members to deliberate on and consider that would increase in-person learning opportunities for students in grades kindergarten through second grade. Many, if not all aspects of the presentation were designed by the Joint Labor Management Committee that consists of school administrators, association presidents, and two of our school committee members. Specifically, the school administration presented an action plan that would allow for all students in these specific grades to attend school full time – five days a week. As a result, the school committee approved a motion that approved the "option 2" action plan with targeted implementation for mid-January pending other decisions that have to be made. Since the December 7th school committee meeting and the approval of the motion that I just reviewed -our facilities team utilized the recent school vacation to prepare the large spaces at Center School and Old Hammondtown School to be utilized as classroom spaces. As a result, the Center School gymnasium (Mrs. Julian) is now a kindergarten classroom, the Center School music room (Mrs. Hughes), art room (Mrs. Aarsheim), and library (Mrs. Aguiar) now host the first grade classes. The students began learning in these spaces following the recent school vacation while continuing to follow their hybrid learning schedule. At Old Hammondtown School the instructional music room (Mrs. Barry), the general music room (Mrs. Renna), and the library (Mrs. Williams) will host the second grade classes starting tomorrow January 12th – while following the hybrid learning schedule.

It is also important for us all to know what the class sizes would be in a full in-person learning model:

At kindergarten:

There would be four classrooms (18, 11, 10, 10)

1st grade:

Three classrooms (15, 15, 14)

2nd grade:

Three classrooms (18, 19, 19)

Moreover, we have reviewed technology needs, completed classroom technology set ups, and ordered technology equipment to support the classroom moves.

Logistically, furniture set up, student desk arrangements, setting up sound systems, projectors, document cameras, ordering and setting up portable sinks, and other actions have been the focus of our work. Additionally, our regular education teachers and special education team has collaborated to discuss this plan and to ensure coverage of all student services. This requires one of our Center School special education liaisons (Mrs. Duke) to transfer with the grade two students to

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Old Hammondtown School. Mrs. Bowman has notified any parents or guardians of children who will require a teacher placement change. The Old Hammondtown gymnasium has been converted to a space that allows for mask breaks, snack and lunch times as needed. All spaces are designed and set up to maintain at least six feet of social distancing between individuals. Furthermore, the building administration has secured additional paraprofessional support to meet the learning needs and scheduling needs of the students at both Center School and Old Hammondtown School. Our specialists and food service personnel have worked collaboratively with the administration regarding the changes that have already occurred and may occur in the near future to accommodate this K-2 action plan. As for transportation services, our administration has worked with Amaral Transportation our vendor to prepare for the second grade students transferring to Old Hammondtown starting tomorrow. Furthermore, any K-2 student who currently utilizes transportation in the hybrid learning model – will be offered transportation 5 days a week when the learning model pivots to full in-person. Any new transportation requests will be honored on a first come – first serve basis - and a waiting list will be utilized if need be. Information regarding the details of this plan and work were shared with parents and guardians in writing via email. Additionally, the building administration held zoom meetings on Thursday, January 7th with the parents and guardians of the students in grades K-2. Drop off and pick up directions and supporting documentation were provided to families last night from the building administration – specifically for grade 2 families. As the Superintendent of Schools – I want to publically thank the many hands that facilitated the completion of this action plan. Much was accomplished in a limited amount of time – in the middle of the school year – while teaching and learning continued to happen in our buildings Monday through Friday. Our facilities staff, teaching staff, support staff, vendors, local health officials, and administration team has worked consistently and efficiently to position the two schools to be able to pivot the learning model of our kindergarten, first grade, and second grade students with approval from school committee. With that being said, we continue to navigate the realities of the COVID-19 pandemic in our local communities. Like most towns and cities – we have seen an increase in cases in our local communities recently. We have continued to collaborate in an ongoing fashion with our local health department. Regarding our two elementary schools to date: we have documented 9 students or staff members who have tested positive for the virus at Center School and 10 at Old Hammondtown School since the start of the school year on September 16th. As of today – at Center School there are no students and/or staff members isolated due to testing positive and 2 individuals who are currently quarantined due to showing symptoms or being a close contact to an individual who has tested positive. As for Old Hammondtown 5 students and/or staff members are currently isolated due to testing positive and 7 individuals are currently quarantined due to showing symptoms or being a close contact to an individual who has tested positive. To the best of our knowledge, we have not experienced in-school transmission of COVID-19 to date. It is my understanding that Emily Field – Mattapoisett Town Nurse is here tonight and at this time – Emily first I want to thank you for your ongoing support and guidance and also ask if there are anything you would like to add tonight.

Ms. Field expressed that the first thing she witnessed be being part of this community is that we all have in common the health and well-being of our children, she expressed that we all want what's best for the kids, she expressed that she agrees with everything Mr. Nelson stated and commends everyone for all their hard work, she expressed it's been like a symphony. She expressed it's an emotional time, that there are a lot of variables, she expressed that it's more than one metric, she stated that the question that's always asked is all the time, what metric, what's the threshold for supporting all in person or hybrid or remote learning, she expressed the truth is that there is not one variable, she expressed that it's a combination of measures, she expressed that the board health's support is data driven, she expressed that to date there is no transmission in school, she commended the teachers, staff and families that have afforded the children to stay with the hybrid model up to

this point, she expressed that we may have an uptick in cases throughout the community as anticipated during the cold weather months, also following the holidays, and the truth is that the uptick may continue, however the transmission of COVID does not reflect in the school setting in the in the K-2 population.

I acknowledge that this reentry plan has been a focal point of discussion in our community and know that there are many different opinions, thoughts, and perspectives on what course of action is best. There is no one path or one plan that everyone will agree upon — I know this. Many parents and guardians have reached out to me to share their viewpoints on the current situation and the possibility of returning our youngest learners to our buildings full-time and I sincerely respect and appreciated hearing from them all. In closing, since the adoption of our Back to School 2020-2021 Plan — our primary goal has been to provide as many services to our children as possible - in-person - and in our schools with safety being factored into the equation every step of the way. Since our last school committee meeting we have been able to position both Center School and Old Hammondtown School to be able to host our kindergarten, first grade, and second grade students in full in-person, while honoring requests for remote learning. January 19th has been identified as the targeted start date for this pivot and at this point I would ask the school committee to take official action to approve a pivot start date. Thank you for the opportunity to update and brief the school committee tonight. At this time Mr. Nelson shared pictures of what the classrooms would look like in the K-2 classrooms.

Mr. Muse thanked Mr. Nelson for his presentation and thanked everyone for all their hard work. He expressed he would be remiss if he didn't mention the hard work of Mr. Jones and his team, Mr. Muse expressed that Mr. Jones unfortunately has suffered a personal loss and he offered his sincere condolences and our greatest appreciation that despite what he was facing he lead the way to have this change actually take place and this district is extremely grateful to him.

Mr. Muse asked if any school committee members had any questions regarding the plan Mr. Nelson just presented.

Ms. Lavin expressed that she wanted to remind this group that when the plan was presented by the Joint Labor Committee as presented by Mrs. Bowman it was the first time that many members of this committee had heard of this reopening plan and Ms. Lavin also highlighted that whenever there is a vote there is no forgone conclusion, there is discussion and people are voting at that point in time. She expressed that she can appreciate the optics that many people were surprised by that, but she reminded people that we had been working with the Joint Labor Committee throughout September and October regarding a K-2 plan. She expressed she realizes it may have not been spoken directly that this was in the works, she expressed we didn't want to put the cart before the horse, until we could figure out some of the logistics.

Ms. Lavin expressed that she does have specific for Mr. Nelson and Ms. Field. Ms. Lavin reported that she has received some emails with concerns around the safety of music room at Center School, she expressed that she believes it is but if he could speak to that it would be helpful. Ms. Lavin also asked Ms. Field to speak about studies that might be out there, she expressed that she has seen two conflicting studies, one indicating that having children in school does not further community spread and then another study suggests that in communities where there is already a high community spread that children in fact are contributing to furthering the spread, she expressed that's the first time she had seen that and she didn't know if Ms. Field had also seen that study. She expressed that the data continues to be new and the in the beginning of the pandemic we were told that children do not get COVID-19 and do not spread COVID-19 but if you look at the 0-19 group in Massachusetts it is the highest number of cases, while still having low hospitalizations. She expressed she's just trying to

rationalize between the mind and the heart on this one, she expressed she's trying to look at the data and the logic but emotionally these numbers are very scary. She also asked about contact tracing, she acknowledged that she understands the department of public health is working around the clock, she's trying to understand how timely are we in our contact tracing? Are we within a day or two or are we a few days out in terms of following up on contact tracing related to schools? Thank you.

Mr. Nelson asked that Mr. Tavares answer the question about the music room, which he knows we use routinely for students. Mr. Tavares reported that the music room has been used by students routinely, he expressed that typically when the COA is in session they buzz visitors in when they enter that separate entrance, he expressed that because the COA is not currently in the building they are able to monitor the entrance/exit via cameras, he expressed that the hallway is also equipped with cameras that are monitored in the main office, therefore visitors are able to be monitored in that part of the building, therefore we are confident that we can secure that part of the building because of the measures that we have in place. Ms. Lavin asked if we need to revisit this protocol if the COA comes back into the building. Mr. Tavares indicated that when the COA is in the building that adds another layer of security because they have someone at the main desk monitoring visitors and controlling who comes in and out of the building. Mr. Muse stated that correctly all visitors should come into the building through the main entrance, he asked Mr. Tavares to confirm that. Mr. Tavares did confirm that. Mr. Muse expressed that when the COA comes back into the building it would make sense to have the school control who comes into the building and not the COA. Mr. Tavares expressed that he would make note of that.

Ms. Field expressed that she would like to see the article that Ms. Lavin was referring to about children furthering the transmission in the community, she would be interested in seeing if in that community there was 6 feet of social distancing maintained and she expressed that the 6 feet is unique to this community and she's very proud to be a part of this community that adopted it, thanks to Mr. Nelson and everyone else who collaborated because that is a key factor in mitigating transmission. She expressed that there are also a lot of measures to this being effective, timely case investigation, contact tracing, wearing a facemask at all times, maintaining the 6 feet of social distancing is key to not becoming a close contact, keeping surfaces clean, deep cleaning buildings, and she expressed that while the 0-19 age bracket being high is not indicative in the lower grades, it's really the social age of the teenagers, that's where the uptick is coming from. She reported this speaks to the diligence of the families to not be hosting gatherings and parties for this to be successful, but if a child goes to school and is infectious and has been exposed to the virus this formula really does work if the 6 feet minimum is maintained and masks are worn at all times. She expressed that all of these things "it's a symphony" but it has worked since the beginning. She expressed that none of this can be an emotional response or a knee jerk reaction, everyone is a crucial player in making this work. She expressed that she commends everyone for their resilience, especially our students who have accepted this culture of wearing masks and staying 6 feet apart of one another. She expressed that as for the contact tracing, Mattapoisett Board of Healthy is doing the contact tracing, she expressed it is countless hours, around the clock, and she expressed that they are contacting families sometimes before they get their test results and they are all working very closely together to mitigate transmission.

Ms. Clifford asked Ms. Field if she was comfortable with the school district moving forward with the K-2 coming back full in-person. Ms. Field expressed that this is an unprecedented year and there is a lot of emotion and that's what she's referring to, she saying that based on the data collection, there is no transmission in schools, and on behalf of the board of health there is no reason not to proceed further in at least exploring and supporting in person learning going forward, she expressed that it is her understanding if transmission does start in schools the learning model can seamlessly

turn back to hybrid. She expressed that the K-2 is a vulnerable population for literacy and otherwise, therefore ultimately for the health and benefit of this population. Ms. Clifford expressed that's why the board made the decision in the first place, but that they are not scientists and feel that if the board of health is supporting that decision it does make them feel more secure in our decision.

Ms. Clifford expressed that some parents today had concerns about options for remote learners and options for 3rd graders and Ms. Clifford asked if there were answers to those questions. Ms. Nelson expressed that there is no perfect solution, he expressed that there are pros and cons to this model, he expressed that there are sacrifices in not only for grade 3 but also for grades 4, 5 and 6 and others. He expressed that one of the biggest pieces we committed to early on was looking for opportunities for our youngest learners, knowing how vulnerable they are with screen time and remote learning, therefore there is an impact in terms of the options in terms of services as they have traditionally been presented. Mr. Nelson asked that Mr. Tavares speak about the specialists' schedule. Mr. Tavares indicated that one of the things they looked at the beginning of the year to reduce transmission was not to have specialists go back and forth between schools, therefore the schedule is setup with three specialists at Center School and three specialists at Old Hammondtown School, and those three specialists remained at their respective schools for the first marking period and they are have now swapped for the second marking period, he expressed that the third trimester will be split 6 weeks at each school. He expressed that in the past specialists would be at Center School in the morning and at Old Hammondtown in the afternoon.

Mr. Nelson expressed that the 6 feet of distancing has been agreed upon with all stakeholders, administration, school committee, association to maintain the safety of our students and our staff and for that reason we are not able to bring back all the grades at this time, he expressed that there are only so many spaces that can accommodate that allow for 6 feet of distancing while keeping the same staffing, he expressed he wanted to make sure parents and all stakeholders were aware of that, he expressed there is no decision that is fixed in this particular school year, no matter what the committee decides tonight, we need to be able to remain flexible in terms of our problem solving abilities and recognize that we know what the data is today and if that data changed and there was concerns around school transmission and other data points we would not hesitate to act accordingly, or if Ms. Field called me and based on what she knows from the information the Board of Health standpoint that I would need to consider certain factors then I would not hesitate to bring the school committee back together to discuss the next course of action.

Ms. Lavin asked someone to address the lunch schedule, the movement of students around the school and also any special education changes that needed to be made to accommodate this new schedule for full in person for K-2. She expressed she understands that the remote learners lost a teacher, we had to suspend the reading intervention program to make this happen and that there was a special education change in order to have a special education teacher go to Old Hammondtown School.

Mr. Tavares indicated that it has always been our practice that on the days the weather is good we always go outside, on the days the weather is a little iffy we have indoor recess, that has always been the practice, he expressed it's the same with physical education, he expressed that Mr. Cabeceiras plans to do the same, and on days he can't go outside he does have activities that can be done safely inside the classroom on a host of topics that fit within his curriculum. Mr. Tavares reported that two of the kindergarten classrooms will eat in the cafeteria and one will eat in the classroom, he expressed that all precautions are taken to as far as food allergies, he expressed there is a custodian on duty to make sure that all rooms that have food in them are cleaned, he expressed that there is ten minutes in between each lunch session, he expressed there are two staff members to make sure

everything gets wiped down and cleaned and ready for the next group. Mr. Tavares expressed that there are schedules for mask breaks, recess and movement breaks to minimize the opportunity for students to be crossing in the hallways. Mr. Tavares reported that dismissal is planned so that students are spread out in the hallway (6 feet apart) for both parent pick up and busses.

Mr. Nelson asked Mr. Davidson to address Ms. Lavin's question around special education services. Mr. Davidson reported that originally they had two special education teachers covering cases in grades 2 and 3 and they split the case load between the two of them. Mr. Davidson explained that since grade 3 moved over to Old Hammondtown School they thought it would be a better idea to have one teacher at each school to avoid the travel back and forth, he expressed that they reached out to the families that were affected and they will have an opportunity to meet and work with the new liaison this week before the full in learning model begins as a transition.

Mr. Muse asked regarding transportation, is it correct that we do not have enough seats on the busses to safely transport everyone that is usually transported to school, due to the guidance from the state. Mr. Muse acknowledged that there are a large number of parents who have chosen/volunteered to drive their children to school and will continue to do so, Mr. Muse expressed that the district is relying on the information supplied by the parents indicating that they would drive their children to school, however he has concerns that if a parent has an issue on a particular day and can't get a student to school how does that parent get transportation for that student, he has concerns about a student losing a day of school due to lack of transportation, Mr. Muse expressed if that starts to happen that would be a giant red flag and the committee should be notified so that they could make decisions about how to proceed.

Mr. Nelson expressed that Mr. Muse's summary is correct that similar to the hybrid learning model and based on survey results we had an anticipated number of families that agreed to drive their students to school, he expressed that this year a high percentage of parents have opted to transport their students even in the hybrid learning model, he expressed that requested are honored on a first come first serve basis, Mr. Nelson expressed that Amaral Bus Company has been tremendous in rerouting when we have needed it. Mr. Nelson reported that when they looked at survey data and assumed that any K-2 students currently riding the bus would continue to ride the bus and based on that data we are able to offer ridership to those students five days a week, Mr. Nelson expressed that if a waiting list and the resources were maxed out he would have to bring that scenario to the school committee to look for further resources.

Ms. Lavin asked if we currently have a waiting list for transportation in Mattapoisett? She expressed that her understanding is that even if we bring back all the K-2 current ridership we would continue to meet the DESE transportation guidelines, therefore we wouldn't be producing any additional risks for students in grades 3 to 6.

Mr. Nelson expressed that yes absolutely the guidance will be followed. Mr. Barber reported that there is no waiting list at this time in Mattapoisett.

Ms. Lavin expressed that she had a question/statement regarding the HVAC system, she expressed this has been covered in other meetings, however she feels it's important to review it again for transparency. She expressed it's her understanding that the HVAC system was test for full capacity and that we have purchased portable monitors to check different metrics, she asked if someone to speak to that.

Mr. Nelson expressed that as stated and posted on our COVID-19 reopening website independent auditors/evaluators assessed all of our buildings and we were given full clearance, Mr. Nelson expressed that we continue to problem solve any issues that arise as quickly as possible and we have worked to secure CO2 meters or readers for the classrooms at Old Hammondtown School.

Ms. Lavin asked if as of right now, are there any known problems that have not been remedied. Mr. Nelson expressed that they replaced a thermometer in a particular classroom and continue to have to adjust different valves to make sure we maintain heat ranges in classrooms and that's some of the work that's been done most recently.

Dr. Finning wanted to thank Ms. Field for her thorough review and for the work she is doing in conjunction with the school to keep all the children and the members of our community safe, she expressed that she really appreciated her comments tonight and all the insight she provided and the work she's doing around the clock on our behalf.

Ms. Field thanked Dr. Finning and expressed that it's a collaboration, communication needs to be open and expectations need to be real for this to work. She expressed she needs to thank the school nurses first and foremost because they have been doing contact tracing daily, hourly and to look out for the children and families of Mattapoisett. She expressed that Amanda Stone has also been helping out tremendously and it's with everyone's help that they are able to keep the contact tracing in-house.

Ms. Lavin expressed she has a question that she believes is important to this discussion, she asked if the remote student population remain the same as it was when the school committee was informed of the plan on December 7th, she expressed she believes it's an important data point. Mr. Tavares reported that there are currently 25 students in the remote learning model, he reported that within the last two weeks we have had one 1st grade student switch to remote and one 2nd grade student switch to remote, he also reported that there are two students we were remote who are now coming back full in-person.

Mr. Muse expressed that he would like to say to the community that what you've heard now is extremely comprehensive and an honest statement, he expressed that nothing about education during COVID is what we want it to be, he expressed we are all trying to make the best choices that will impact the most students and not hurt other students he expressed that is a difficult decision and very difficult for all the teachers and administrative team. Mr. Muse expressed that we have been laboring over this for months, he expressed we have always made it clear that it is our goal to have as many students in the buildings as possible while doing it safely and equitable. He expressed that the safety won't be debated, we will stand by all the recommendations and guidance and as Ms. Field stated it is not just one metric and if everyone does their part and wears masks, complies with social distancing and washes their hands then we will be successful. Mr. Muse expressed that this committee does not decide anything on a single metric, he expressed that this is about the overall picture for all of our students, Mr. Muse stated that that right now the truth is I don't know how I will vote, because I understand the consequences, I understand the difficulty and I am weighing all of those. He expressed he appreciates all the hard work that has gone into this plan, he appreciates the fact that we have positioned ourselves to be able to discuss bringing a portion of our students back, he expressed that we have to not ever stop trying, he expressed that this is a heartfelt challenge to make this decision, he expressed that he knows it impacts a lot of people differently, he expressed he respects his committee members, the staff and all of the parents who have shared their opinions and their information, he expressed "your emails and comments have been read". He expressed that there are 5 people considering this plan and we have everyone in our thoughts. Mr. Muse expressed

that there is a request by Mr. Nelson to move forward with the pivot to full in-person learning for the K-2 on January 19, 2021. Mr. Muse stated that should the vote be no that we would need a second vote to say what action we would take.

Ms. Lavin expressed that we have heard a lot from Ms. Field about student safety and we have talked a lot in the Joint Labor committee about teacher safety and she's wondering if it would be ok if we could hear from one of the teachers about how they feel about this plan.

Mr. Muse stated that he would be more than happy to hear from the teachers. Ms. Hughes spoke on behalf of the teachers.

Ms. Hughes expressed that the nice thing about this plan is the phased in approach, she expressed that they have been able to phase in, she explained that some classrooms were moved over holiday break so they had this past week in their new classrooms while still working in the hybrid learning model, and she explained that small groups were brought in to get ready, and that this week 2nd grade will start doing the same thing so that they can get ready to their new setting. She expressed that as far as the staff, if health and safety guidelines are all in place the teachers of the youngest learners are ready and willing to proceed with the full in-person plan. "We're ready to go".

Mr. Muse asked Ms. Jacobsen, the other MEA Co-President if she would like to contribute. She expressed that she always defers to Ms. Hughes when it comes to the youngest learners, she expressed that her 6th graders are fascinated by the idea that the 2nd graders are going to be at Old Hammontown School. She expressed that there's a real question when talking about numbers and it would be important for it to be said in a public forum would be the fact that when we move to full in-person we have fewer opportunities to support children who are quarantined because right now there are a lot of opportunities for students to connect with their students virtually when we have a group that's full in-person that won't be part of the children's schedule anymore, so as people move forward it's very important to keep that in mind. She expressed in this whole discussion we have been talking about how to allocate the resources we have and things are very different with unlimited resources and we have moved a lot of our resources to this plan and I know some teachers are concerned as we move forward if the cases do continue to rise, this plan would leave us much less able to in K-2 to provide instruction for those children who would be quarantined or face long absences. She expressed she doesn't believe that's a non-starter it's just something to consider as we move forward.

Mr. Muse assured Ms. Jacobsen that her concerns and the concerns of all teachers would be considered and those issues would be monitored.

Mr. Muse asked if a school committee member would like to make a motion to approve the plan presented by Mr. Nelson.

Motion to approve the effective date of Tuesday, January 19, 202 for the reopening plan approved by the school committee on December 7, 2020. Ms. Barrows asked if she could add a caveat that this could pivot back to remote model or hybrid model should there be an uptick of school transmission. Mr. Muse expressed that as Mr. Nelson mentioned in recent comments that this is not a fixed plan and any uptick or other scenario can and will be addressed as appropriate, Mr. Muse asked Dr. Finning if she was comfortable adding that caveat to the motion. Dr. Finning referred to Mr. Nelson for direction, she believed he was looking for a motion specifically, to address this plan, she felt that was the model we were operating under and

therefore, no motion was needed to relay that message. Mr. Nelson stated that anytime there were

concerns about changing the learning model he would bring these to the attention of the committee for the appropriate decisions, he expressed he would do that regardless so he is fine with either motion.

MOTION: Dr. Finning SECONDED: Ms. Barrows

ROLL CALL: Clifford – Yes; Barrows – Yes; Finning – Yes; Lavin – Yes; Muse - Yes

B. Student Opportunity Act Approval

Mr. Nelson reported that Principal Bowman could not be at the meeting tonight due to personal matters. Therefore, instead of seeking approval he briefed the school committee and will bring this back for approval at the next meeting in February.

Mr. Nelson reported the Dr. White talked about this with school committee members last year. Mr. Nelson explained that the Student Opportunity Act is legislation that was approved in 2019 and DESE has asked each district to identify a learning gap for specific students where they actually give recommendations based on the review of internal data and create a three year plan with measurable outcomes for the school district to continuously review, monitor and submit to DESE, the carrot that was given to school districts was the possibility of increase funding to help bundle some of the resources that were already in the district or supported by local funds with some new dollars. Mr. Nelson reported that most recently Commissioner Riley advised Superintendents that the Student Opportunity Act funding has been put on hold based on the current pandemic that we are facing, however the Department of Education is asking for school district to file their student opportunity acts in January with the understanding that revisions can be made in the future. Mr. Nelson expressed that he will work with admiration to submit the draft and bring this back to the school committee for official approval in February.

Ms. Lavin asked if someone could send her the notes from the meetings last year where this as mentioned. Mr. Nelson stated that he could do that, and that he would also send her the link from DESE that explains what the act is and how it works. She expressed that the information from DESE would be great.

C. FY22 Draft Budget Discussion

Mr. Nelson reported that the work has begun in terms of looking at the FY22 Budget, he asked Mr. Barber to give a brief update.

Mr. Barber reported that the Mattapoisett Budget Sub-Committee had their initial meeting in December and had the opportunity to listen to feedback from our Principal as well as other administrative team members, Mr. Barber expressed they spoke about keeping the same academic structure and high level of performance for our students. He expressed that over the last few weeks they had the opportunity to modify and adjust the respective values, especially taking into consideration things that are true and transparent such as contracts or out of district costs and different variables of that nature. Mr. Barber expressed that at the next meeting they would have a broader scope of where they stand with the FY22 Budget. Mr. Barber expressed that he would continue to update the committee.

D. School Committee Meeting Format

Mr. Muse expressed that this is a question for the committee to decide on how the next meeting will be held, whether we have a fully remote meeting or a hybrid meeting. Mr. Muse stated that he

asked for this to be put on the agenda because he feels very strongly that going into the superintendent's office or any school building is not necessary. Mr. Muse expressed that he doesn't understand the benefit of a member going into the school building to hold a meeting. Mr. Muse expressed that his request of the committee is that we go forward having our meetings remotely. Mr. Muse expressed that tonight's meeting is a lot clearer than then last meeting when some members were in the school. Mr. Muse asked that this be an open item on the agenda and that we make the next meeting remote. Mr. Muse asked for comments from the school committee. Mr. Muse asked for a motion to be considered for meetings to be fully remote for the near future.

Ms. Clifford expressed that she did have a hard time hearing some people last time but she's still ok with having the meetings hybrid as long as committee members remember to speak to the camera and the community.

Mr. Muse asked for the members that would like to be present in the school, "what is the benefit"? He expressed that resources are used that don't need to be such as the room being set up and cleaned.

Dr. Finning reported that the committee received several emails over the course of the summer from parents, teachers and others in the district that requested that if we were asking our teachers and staff to return to school we should be willing to model the same behavior, Dr. Finning expressed that's the main reason she has chosen to do the meetings from the school building. She expressed that she has gone every time and she only didn't go tonight because she would have been the only one there and she didn't want to keep Mr. Nelson there if he chose not to participate from the office.

Mr. Muse expressed that he has never seen anything from any stakeholders requesting for us to have our meetings in the building, he expressed if there was something it would have been appropriate to share it with the entire committee.

Ms. Lavin expressed that the school committee is asking our teachers to operate in the hybrid model with our students and she wanted to understand what that experience would be like with the school equipment and school technology, she expressed she found it to be very helpful and a motivating factor for bringing everyone back at the lower grades. She expressed that she has received audio complaints and that's why tonight she opted to be remote. She expressed that she's not ready to make a motion.

Mr. Muse expressed he's only looking for a motion for the next meeting. Ms. Lavin expressed that she would like to have the option and she has not had the feedback about how the audio is from this meeting.

Mr. Muse expressed that we don't allow people into our buildings unless there is a purpose to accomplish and he expressed in his opinion school committee members are not accomplishing anything by going in and holding meetings in the school. Mr. Muse expressed that if there is no motion he will move on and that he seriously regrets that we are not showing our community that we will do everything possible to spread this virus and he expressed that by going back into the building unnecessarily is doing something however small.

V. New Business

B. Business

1. Financial Report

Mr. Barber reported to the school committee that as of December 31, 2020 the Mattapoisett currently has \$460,920 available of the general funds appropriated in the 2021 Fiscal Year. Per the attached

Year to Date Budget Report by Department, we are able to identify how our funds are currently encumbered and expended. This report recognizes that of the \$7,357,475 appropriated to the District, 88.26% is directly assigned and is spent/ encumbered to student instruction.

Mr. Barber also reported to the school committee on food service and facilities.

C. Personnel

Mr. Nelson reviewed the following personnel changes with the school committee.

The following personnel changes took place since the last meeting on December 7, 2020

| Name | Position | |
|-------------------|----------------------|-----------------------------|
| James Martin | Custodian Supervisor | Resignation |
| Michelle Sullivan | Custodian Supervisor | Effective December 29, 2020 |

CHAIRPERSON'S REPORT

Mr. Muse expressed his gratitude to everyone for all their hard work. He expressed that he feels for everyone involved and impacted by these decisions and he also understands that we are still in the state where things can change dramatically without much of any notice, which is really unnerving. He expressed that the teachers, staff and administration has done a fantastic job and he personally appreciates it.

CENTRAL OFFICE ADMINISTRATORS REPORT

Dr. Pearson- Campbell reported as follows:

Today, the Office of Teaching and Learning organized a district-wide professional development. Educators met either as district grade level or content areas. Educators were able to choose between meeting face-to-face or via Zoom. The vision for this professional development allowed educators to collaborate with each other to support planning, common assessments, and implementation. I would like to thank the educators for being zoom hosts, which allowed us to have 10 or more meetings using the Zoom platform at the same time, while I was in the background ensuring everyone was able to participate in the various meetings. We also had a keynote speaker Mr. Bronke, who provided us with an engaging interactive professional development that focused on project based learning. As part of the professional development day, we had teacher leaders provided modules to build the capacity of skills using interactive learning such as pear deck, yoga in the classroom, and using various interactive technology. My office received great feedback from the teachers and mentioned they were excited to have choices to choose from as well as the opportunity to collaborate with one another.

Mr. Craig Davidson reported on the new Structured Learning Time (please see attachment A).

Ms. Lavin asked if the changes being made will be differentiated by grade level? Mr. Nelson reported that building administration will meet with each grade level to find the best ways to implement the new regulations. Ms. Lavin asked how drastic are the changes for grades 3 to 6? Mr. Nelson expressed that they would not be overly drastic, he expressed that they will be looking at some of the synchronous time and perhaps looking at the Monday schedule a little different, he expressed he doesn't see a major overall by any means, but just making sure that we are meeting the number of hours and doing it meaningfully and we are meeting the definition of synchronous learning means in relation to the new regulation. Mr. Lavin asked if there were any implications for our remote program? Mr. Nelson expressed that the regulations for districts are for them to focus on their primary learning model therefore we are not held to the remote learning standards at

this time because our primary learning model is hybrid, however our teachers will continue to produce and operate a meaningful and robust remote learning platform for those students.

Mr. Nelson expressed that he did have an update on the Kindergarten Report Card. He asked Mr. Davidson to update the committee. Mr. Davidson reported that Kindergarten Report Cards will go out on February 4th and 5th. Mr. Davidson also gave a few other timelines for the Early Childhood Office as follows:

- February $3^{\rm rd}$ @ 6:00pm Parent information session via Zoom focusing on the registration process
- March 1st Online registration, required paperwork deadline
- April Communication regarding kindergarten screening process
- May/June Transition activities planned social distancing protocols
- June Kindergarten screening
- August Classroom assignment letters mailed to parents

PRINCIPAL'S REPORT

Mr. Nelson mentioned that Mrs. Bowman is absent tonight but that she did submit a Principal Report to the school committee. Please refer to "MTSC 01112021 Principal Report".

VIII. School Committee

A. Committee Reports

- **1. ORR District School Committee** Mr. Muse reported that ORR met on January 9th and approved the naming of the Press Box, accepted a donation and approved a plaque donated and presented by students to a fallen classmate, Nolan Gibbons, Mr. Muse expressed that it was beautifully presented. Mr. Muse reported that foreign language was removed as a requirement to graduate, he also reported that they approved a winter athletic program with some extremely restrictive restrictions.
 - **2. SMEC** Ms. Clifford reported they meet next week.
- **3. READS** Mr. Nelson reported that he met with the READS Board and they reviewed the special educators report, review of the FY22 budget, the annual report and various policies.
- **4. Early Childhood Council -** Ms. Barrows reported that they will be meeting on January 26th.
 - **5. MASC** No Report
 - **6. Mattapoisett Capital Needs Committee** No Report
- **7. Tri-Town Education Foundation** Ms. Barrows reported that they will be meeting tomorrow and they are still accepting grant applications.
- **8. Policy Sub-Committee-** Ms. Lavin reported that they met on December 14th and reviewed various policies that will be coming to all school committee for review. She also reported that at her request they reviewed the open comment policies and she conversed with peers across the other three districts. She reported that the policy state what Chairperson Muse has been saying around open comments being in the beginning, Ms. Lavin shared that Marion and Rochester do chose to have their open comments at the end.
 - 9. Budget Sub-Committee- Reported earlier.
 - **10. Clock Committee** No Report.
- 11. Anti-Racism Committee Dr. Finning reported that the committee has continued to meet. She reported that Mr. Davidson and Dr. Pearson-Campbell are co-chairing that with representatives of each of the school committees as well as representatives from the families involved with the Tri-Town Against Racism. She reported that we have split up into two sub committees, one working on survey that will go out to all students grades 6 through 12 and the other

group is working on definition for the key terms. Dr. Finning expressed she's hopeful to have student representation soon as they have been requesting, given the concerns they are voicing on social media platforms.

Mr. Muse reviewed future business and timeline.

Ms. Clifford asked for an update on MCAS Testing. Mr. Nelson reported that currently the commissioner has told superintendents to continue to plan for MCAS testing at all levels, he expressed that there will be some more major modifications at the high school level based on retesting. However, the elementary schools have been told to prepare for MCAS testing but that it will look differently that it has in the past, they are looking to use it to identify where students are at in light of the COVID-19 situation. Mr. Nelson expressed he will continue to update the committee.

Ms. Lavin asked how the testing would be done for the remote population. Mr. Nelson reported that those specifics have not been sent to superintendents, however from conferences with commissioner Riley it seems like he is open to the idea of having two different platforms.

Mr. Tavares wanted to take this opportunity to thank the staff of both schools for all their hard work and embracing our return plan, he expressed that he could not be more proud of their efforts, they have worked diligently to make this happen, the rooms are ready, he expressed they have a nice welcome plan for the 2nd graders at Old Hammontown. He thanked everyone for the opportunity to express that, "Job well done to everyone".

Motion to go in to Executive Session at 9:02 p.m. for the Purpose of #3 and #7 – to comply with the provisions of any general or special law and come out only to adjourn.

MOTION: Ms. Barrows SECONDED: Ms. Lavin

ROLL CALL: Clifford – Yes; Barrows – Yes; Finning – Yes; Lavin – Yes; Muse - Yes

Respectfully Submitted, Diana Russo

Student Learning Time Mattapoisett 2020-2021

Summary of New Requirements

At the meeting of the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (Board) on December 15, 2020, the Board adopted additional amendments to the Student Learning Time (SLT) regulations, 603 CMR 27.00, on an emergency basis. The amendments establish minimum levels for live instruction and synchronous instruction that districts operating hybrid and remote learning models must provide. The amendments include the following standards, effective <u>January 19, 2021</u>:

- Districts and schools operating a hybrid learning model must provide students with access to at least 35 hours of "live instruction" over a 10-school day period, averaged across the grades in the hybrid model (excluding pre-kindergarten and kindergarten). Live instruction means the combination of in-person and remote synchronous instruction.

- Students must have an opportunity to interact with educators each school day, including a required daily "live" check-in between students and educators.

Summary of New Requirements cont.

Synchronous learning, also referred to as synchronous instruction, is defined in the regulations as "learning that is directed by a teacher and that happens in real time with other students, such as during live, whole-class instruction, and small group work." Below are a few examples of what does and does not count:

- · Counts as synchronous instruction:
 - o <u>Live online classes</u> that the teacher leads for the whole class, which may include breakout rooms for students to complete tasks and activities with access to the teacher.
 - o <u>Live stream</u> of in-person instruction accessed by remote students.
 - o <u>Small group instruction</u> while students are learning remotely. In this model, a teacher is present online with their class, working with small groups of students in turn while the remaining students engage in independent or small group work. Students should be able to signal to the teacher that they need support.

Regulations are legally binding, any district that does not comply with the regulations or receive a waiver by January 19, 2021 will be required to make up any structured learning time missed due to non-compliance by the end of the school year.

Background and Rationale

Over the fall, there has been a distressing increase in the mental health challenges our students are facing. In an October 2020 report, the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) noted an increase in the proportion of child emergency department visits for mental health-related reasons, which has remained elevated through the fall. The report states that: "Compared with 2019, the proportion of mental health-related visits for children aged 5–11 and 12–17 years increased approximately 24% and 31%, respectively." (https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/69/wr/mm6945a3.htm)

Feelings of isolation and disconnection among our students are a contributing cause to this growing mental health crisis, the effects of which may persist for years. A literature review in the *Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry* on the impact of loneliness and isolation on mental health found that: "social isolation and loneliness increased the risk of depression, and possibly anxiety at the time at which loneliness was measured...." (https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/32504808/)

One way to prevent the isolation and disconnection that many students are feeling is frequent connections and interactions with teachers and peers. Such interactions are embedded in "live" instructional methods, including in both in-person and remote synchronous learning modalities. Asynchronous learning, by contrast, does not typically feature direct, live interaction between educators and students or students with their peers. As of early fall, data collected by the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) indicate variability across the Commonwealth in the amount of live instruction that districts are providing to students. [1]

To help mitigate the significant mental health challenges facing our students, DESE is taking a multi-pronged approach. This has included issuing guidance, providing professional learning, and offering grant opportunities to help address students' mental health needs. Another important component of this approach is DESE's existing Comprehensive Health Curriculum Framework which includes a strand specific to social emotional learning. Districts are encouraged to continue to use this framework. In addition, through the newly amended regulations outlined above, DESE is requiring minimum standards for live instruction (which includes in-person and synchronous remote learning) in districts and schools using remote or hybrid models.

In amending the student learning time requirements, DESE continues to adapt its guidance and requirements based on new information to best meet the needs of children.

^[1] In early November 2020, DESE gathered information on the number of hours students spend learning over the course of 10 school days. In particular, districts were asked to provide information about the number of hours they provide to students during in-person instruction, remote synchronous instruction, and asynchronous instruction. DESE collected this information from all school districts for all students in grades 1, 4, 7, and 10.

Overview of DESE Guidance Document



Part I: Addresses key considerations in interpreting the amended SLT regulations

Part II: Outlines strategies for increasing synchronous learning time to

meet new regulations

Part III: Provides additional specific guidance for implementing the regulations

in early elementary grades

Part IV: Addresses the waiver process that is available to districts.

Part I: Key Considerations

Daily interaction requirement in hybrid and fully remote models. In both hybrid and remote models, districts and schools must provide interactions each school day between educators and students. This interaction may be instructional or non-instructional but must take place "live" (i.e., over video or telephone) for all students.

Requirements apply to the predominant learning model that the district or school is offering for each grade level. For example, if a district is providing in-person instruction or a hybrid learning model for most students, and some families have chosen a fully remote learning model for their children, the district is encouraged but not required to provide 40 hours of synchronous instruction over 10 school days for those students.

Schools and districts that are moving to increase live and synchronous instructional hours may find it helpful to consider strategies that others have successfully implemented. Some strategies may require more resources to implement than others. Depending on the circumstances of a particular district or school, it may make sense to implement a strategy system-wide or target strategies to specific grade levels and/or subject areas, as needed. For further support, please email SLTsupport@mass.gov.

A second SLT data collection will take place in early 2021. Districts and schools will be required to update their student learning time survey responses if their schedules have changed between November and January. DESE will re-issue the SLT survey and ask districts to submit their two-week schedules for the weeks of January 25 – February 5. This data collection window will open in early February and close on February 12, 2021.

Part II: Strategies to Increase Synchronous Learning Time

- 1. Repurpose asynchronous learning time
- 2. Trade some planning time for learning time
- 3. Extend the length of certain classes based on student needs
- 4. Increase remote group size
- 5. Utilize simultaneous instruction (livestreaming)
- 6. Assign new or existing staff members to lead additional synchronous learning periods



Possible Strategies Defined

- 1. Repurpose asynchronous learning time: Assign teachers or other staff to facilitate instruction during periods that are currently designated for independent (asynchronous) learning. This time could be reallocated from a fully asynchronous day (e.g., Wednesday in many systems) or asynchronous periods on an otherwise teacher-supported day. Depending on how staff are currently assigned, this may require re-assigning some staff from other responsibilities, or using student teachers to support instruction.
- $\begin{tabular}{l} [1] \\ Independent learning for purposes of calculating structured learning time does not include study halls or homework. \\ \end{tabular}$
- 2. <u>Trade some planning time for learning time</u>: Most hybrid and remote models include significant increases in planning time. Extended planning time was beneficial at the start of the year when districts and schools were working to establish new health and safety requirements and adjust to a remote learning environment. However, fewer weekly planning hours may be needed at this point in the school year. Consider repurposing a portion of planning time for synchronous learning, while sustaining significant collaborative planning time blocks for educators, such as 90 minutes each week.
- **3.** Extend the length of certain classes based on student needs: With several months of experience in remote instruction, many educators may be prepared to teach longer class periods. Wherever possible, leaders should target increases in instructional time to match student needs. For example, a school where students are falling behind in literacy might target additional time for reading instruction.

Possible Strategies Defined:

- **4.** <u>Increase remote group size</u>: Remote "classrooms" have no physical limitations on group size, except for student/teacher ratios associated with special education requirements. Therefore, leaders could re-assign some students from asynchronous periods to existing synchronous remote periods. Older students could also be re-grouped into larger remote classes, creating opportunities to add more synchronous class periods. In either case, consider use of additional staff as highlighted in Recommendation #6.
- 5. <u>Utilize simultaneous instruction (livestreaming</u>: In many hybrid models, teachers provide live instruction to in-person students while remote students learn independently. Switching to simultaneous, or livestreamed, instruction allows the teacher to reach all students at the same time while increasing the amount of synchronous learning time for remote students. As highlighted in Recommendation #6, student teachers or aides may provide additional support in this model.
- **6.** <u>Assign new or existing staff members to lead additional synchronous learning periods</u>: In addition to pre-existing flexibilities, DESE has authorized new flexibilities with staff assignments for 2020-21. Below are examples of staffing moves schools and districts can consider:
 - Assign student teachers to lead small-group instruction and/or tutor struggling students.
 - o **Pair in-field and out-of-field educators as co-teachers**. Co-teachers are considered "in-field" as long as the other co-teacher is appropriately licensed.
 - **Re-assign non-teaching staff,** including aides, librarians, interventionists, assistant principals, and others, to support instruction. Certified educators are eligible to teach out-of-field up to 50% of the time this year.
 - o **Bring back retired teachers.** The retiree income cap has been lifted for this school year.
 - o Hire bachelor's degree-holders as long-term substitutes for the school year.

Part III: Implementing the SLT regulations in early elementary grades Examples of Accepted Structured Learning Times

- A teacher begins the day with all students in a virtual classroom where the morning meeting takes place followed by an English Language Arts (ELA) lesson. Following the lesson, the teacher provides students with a project or hands-on learning activity to complete over the next 30 minutes related to the ELA lesson. Students do not need to remain on screen as they complete the assignment, but the teacher remains live in the virtual meeting to provide students with support to complete the activity, as needed, and to check in with individuals or small groups of students. Following the 30 minutes, children then return to their computers to share their completed work and talk about the process with their teacher and peers.
- As most students are working on a math assignment or activity off-screen, the teacher could be meeting with a small group of students on a particular lesson. Students in the small group meet with the teacher for 20 minutes and then transition to work on their project while another group of students connect back into their virtual classroom to engage with the teacher in the next small group session. This rotation can happen across the course of the day and across projects so that the teacher is able to meet with different groups of students in smaller settings to work on specific skills and concepts while the rest of the class works on an assignment off-screen. In this example, the teacher remains on screen so students not in the small group can briefly check back in for support.
- Students are provided opportunities throughout the course of the day in breakout rooms to work cooperatively on different assignments while the teacher moves in and out of the different breakout rooms to provide support, as needed. This format provides students the opportunity to connect socially as well as to work cooperatively on assignments and support each other's learning.

Part IV: Waiver process for districts and schools requesting special consideration

- 1. **High level of student engagement in asynchronous instruction**: Districts and schools that demonstrate, with evidence, that the asynchronous instruction provided yields a level of student engagement that is comparable to live or synchronous instruction; or
- 2. Alternative education: Districts and schools serving students through an alternative education[1] program or school that cannot, due to the structure of their program, meet the new standard; or
- 3. Operational constraints in a hybrid learning model: Districts and schools that demonstrate, with evidence, that specific operational constraints impose an insurmountable barrier to meeting the new standard; or
- 4. Synchronous methods are reaching a meaningful number of students during scheduled asynchronous time, even if these methods do not reach all students: Districts and schools that demonstrate that a meaningful number of students even if not all students have access to livestreaming, small group instruction, or other synchronous learning time during scheduled asynchronous time; or
- 5. **Family satisfaction:** Districts and schools that demonstrate, with evidence, that surveys indicate strong parental/guardian satisfaction with the current model and parents indicate that students are highly engaged.