

August 13, 2020

Dear Norwell School Community,

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused a great deal of disruption to public education. In March, we were asked to transition to a crisis form of remote education. Although this was a sudden and unforeseen transition, I want to thank all of our school personnel and all of our families, students and parents, for all of their efforts at the end of last year. While we learned to be flexible and understanding, we also learned how important it is to connect our teachers with our students. Learning at the K-12 level requires in-person interaction and clarification.

As we have looked forward to what school could be in the fall; we have been required to address many different forms of safety guidance; we have heard about individuals deep concerns and anxieties about returning in person; we have heard students clearly articulate that they must return to the classroom and cannot continue to learn from home; and we are still unsure of the track the virus will take over time. While there are many concerns that may not be answered quickly, we have been striving to do what is best for our students and to produce a learning environment that mitigates the spread of the virus as much as possible.

During the summer, administrators and teachers examined the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary (DESE) guidance reports for reopening school in the fall. Administratively we performed a feasibility study to determine what we would need to open school safely for all students. We reflected upon our guiding principles as each model was examined. We sought the advice of our Town Departments and our teachers. Fortunately our School Committee and teacher's union, the Education Association of Norwell, have been communicating on many complex and difficult topics since late May. Everyone has contributed their time, energy, and creativity to develop a path forward.

We have consistently monitored the Department of Public Health data for Massachusetts and will continue to be guided by this information. I want to thank the citizens of Norwell for helping to mitigate the spread of the virus in Norwell. This has not been easy and must be an ongoing process to ensure that we are able to bring our students back into the schools. As a school community, we will need to follow the safety measures outlined in this document to continue to mitigate the spread of COVID-19.

Our collective availability to return to school safely is of utmost importance to our students. While learning will not look the same this year, we have learned that our students need contact with their teachers. Students also need contact with one another. Norwell Public Schools is a community of learners and consistent interaction is integral to the process. It is our sincere hope to bring students together safely and to provide a productive learning environment. Please remember, as we have all learned, that we will continue to make adjustments in real time. Additional guidance, protocols, and procedures will continue to be developed, shared, and implemented as we move forward.

Sincerely,

Matthew A. Keegan

Superintendent of Schools