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Dear Parents, Guardians, Faculty and Staff,

I am writing to provide you with an update on our planning process for the start of a new school year in Norwell Public Schools. We are tentatively scheduled to resume student learning on September 16th. School districts have been provided 10 days at the start of the year to complete planning and preparations for students return to learning. The School Committee will vote a new calendar on Monday, August 3, 2020 at 7:00 p.m.

Our planning process continues to be guided by a vigilant monitoring of public health data in Massachusetts, and we are encouraged that indicators about the virus continue to move in the right direction. The Commonwealth's careful and disciplined approach has enabled our state gradually to begin reopening, in part because of strong compliance with health and safety precautions. The question now on all of our minds is how and when we apply those lessons learned to begin safely reopening our public schools.

As you have heard, the Massachusetts Department of Education has directed districts to submit by July 31, 2020, a preliminary plan that addresses the feasibility of three options for serving students at the start of the school year. Those options include a full return to daily, in-person attendance, a hybrid plan combining in-school learning with some remote learning, and finally, a 100% remote learning program. Each district's final plan, approved by the School Committee, is due to the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) by August 10. Given the significant changes these plans will require in the way schools operate, we also must negotiate our proposal with Education Association of Norwell, the teachers and secretaries and aides' unions. We are on a very tight timeline to meet the August 10 deadline set by the DESE for submitting final fall plans.

Of course, we know that under normal circumstances, students would be best served in schools every day, interacting with their peers and engaged in live classroom learning. While our educators and families worked incredibly hard last spring to implement remote learning, we know that approach presented enormous challenges, did not reach all students (particularly those with the greatest needs), and is not an adequate substitute for in-person interaction with teachers. When out of school, our students also lack access to all of the academic, mental, and physical supports that help ensure their social-emotional well-being, particularly in navigating the effects of trauma during these tremendously challenging times. Therefore, we believe our families and students deserve more than a fully remote learning plan.

In order to adhere to the school reopening guidance provided by DESE, consistent with recommendations from the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and the American Pediatric Association, we also do not believe we can safely meet the current physical distancing requirements with all students and staff in the buildings at the same time given our current resources. **However, we do believe we can make significant changes in our school schedules and operating procedures to make a partial return to in-person learning both safe and successful.** This approach will require strategies to ensure physical distancing, as well as a series of other critical health and safety measures, including wearing face coverings, washing hands frequently, cleaning and sanitizing facilities, screening regularly for symptoms of illness, and staying home from school when sick, among others. Our planning process includes a comprehensive set of strategies and investments to minimize the risk of transmitting the virus.

We intend to recommend the hybrid model to the School Committee on Monday night. If this plan is approved, we will pursue negotiations with all impacted unions for a hybrid learning plan, which would bring the students back into school buildings for in-person instruction in smaller, socially distanced groups on a rotating basis, combined with a remote learning program on the days students are not scheduled to be physically in school. This plan also enables us to bring a subset of students in greatest need of in-person instruction and support, particularly students with disabilities, back to school every day – but also in smaller, distanced settings with all other precautions in place.

We recognize that the circumstances of every family and staff member are different, and that no plan ultimately will satisfy everyone in our community. Rest assured that we are working diligently to explore every option available to us; we remain guided by the science to keep our students and staff safe and healthy; and we will be prepared to make adjustments along the way if the public health conditions or other variables change over time.

The three learning models will be presented to the School Committee on Monday, August 3rd at 7:00 p.m. in a Zoom Webinar: [NSC Webinar](#). We invite you to share your questions, comments, and ideas to help inform and strengthen our plans.

We will keep you informed about our progress in developing a final plan and in our negotiations with the unions. We will continue to keep everyone updated as we share our procedures and protocols. I am confident that we can prioritize both safety and learning as we prepare for the start of a successful school year. Thank you for your patience and cooperation in these difficult times.

Sincerely,



Matthew A. Keegan
Superintendent of Schools

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