

August 4, 2020

Dear Somerville Public Schools Families,

After much discussion and review of preliminary data from our building assessment, we made the decision this morning to begin the 2020-2021 school year with full remote learning in the initial phase of reopening model. Over the last several months, we have been working diligently to put all the pieces in place to support a safe return to in-person instruction in a phased hybrid model. That planning has included bringing in an engineering firm to assess the ventilation and filtration systems in our school buildings, and working to set up a virus surveillance testing plan for students and staff. As we have said from the beginning, the safety and health of our students, staff, and families is and will remain our top priority. We do not believe that opening school for in-person instruction without these two important safety components of the school reopening plan in place and resolved is safe or in the best interest of our school community.

We appreciate all of the thoughts, feelings, and feedback our staff and families have provided over the past several weeks. One thing is clear: Everyone is in agreement that in-person instruction is the best thing for students and educators miss their students and students miss their teachers, paras and counselors. We are doing everything we can to be ready for an eventual return to phased in-person instruction under the new safety guidelines. At day's end, we need to ensure that we have done everything possible to mitigate the risks of a return to our schools – so that our staff, students, and families feel safe and are safe. As a community, our approach in Somerville has been guided by a firm commitment to health and safety first, recognizing that we are dealing with a very complex and continuously evolving health crisis.

We are actively exploring options including outdoor solutions as a way that staff, students, and families can meet in person. We are also actively working with our partners who provide youth services in the hope that we can develop a menu of activities outdoors to help support the social emotional needs of students for the remote learning time. In the coming weeks, we will continue to address the ventilation and filtration issues to allow for a safe return to our school buildings, and work with our health partners to create a testing system that will further ensure the safety of our students and staff. We will also continue to work with our unions collaboratively around how to have a successful reopening with a more robust remote learning experience for all and identify the timeline and conditions for an in-person return, especially for our ELL, Special Education, and Prek-2 students who struggle the most in a remote model.

Over the next few weeks, as we continue to develop, negotiate, and finalize our remote learning and hybrid plans, we will send regular updates including the new academic calendar and opportunities for outdoor activities for our students during remote learning. We appreciate your partnership and continued patience and understanding as we do our best to work through this unprecedented challenge.

Respectfully,

Mayor Joe Curtatone, Superintendent Mary Skipper, School Committee Chair Carrie Normand