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Dear SPS Families and Staff,

We have had an excellent start to the school year! It has been wonderful having our students back in our classrooms. Students and staff are energized and ready for the year ahead. We were excited to have our youngest learners -- our PreK and Kindergarten students -- join us this week. PreK students started the school year on a slightly shortened school and afterschool schedule for their first two days to help with their transition to a longer day. We look forward to having all our students on their regular schedules starting on Monday.

Below are some important reminders as we settle into the school year, as well as some key program updates. We will continue to keep you informed of changes or other updates as the year progresses.

### **Important Reminder Regarding Close Contacts and Quarantine**

**Parents and guardians are reminded that if their child has been identified as a close contact outside of school or if a child's household member has COVID, the student should stay home, even if the student is asymptomatic, until the nurse has been contacted to determine the most appropriate course of action.** The parent/guardian should contact the school nurse to determine which of the protocols outlined in the [Massachusetts Department of Public Health guidelines](#) an asymptomatic student who has been identified as a close contact can follow -- either Test and Stay for 7 days, quarantine for 7 days and test out early, or quarantine for the fully recommended 10 days. Any symptomatic individuals should self-isolate for the recommended period as noted in the MA DPH guidelines.

Even though we have a number of safety measures in place in our schools to mitigate the spread of COVID-19, including routine COVID-19 pooled testing for all students and staff, it is critically important that we each do our part by following all established protocols.

### **COVID Testing Consent Forms**

Another important part of our COVID safety measures is regular pooled testing of all students and staff in the district. Because we are using a new, state-provided vendor (CIC), we are collecting new consent forms for the testing. The testing is free, quick, and non-invasive and involves a simple swab of the lower portion of each nostril. **Parents/guardians who have not yet completed a consent form for each of your children enrolled in our schools are urged to do so right away.** Routine testing is not only an important preventative measure for the person being tested and those they come in contact with, it also minimizes the risk that the student will have to quarantine if they're deemed to be a close contact, therefore resulting in lost learning time and lost access to extracurricular activities. Consent forms can be completed online at: <https://www.cic-health.com/consent/ma?district=Somerville#consent>.

### **Additional COVID-related Updates**

**New School Committee Proof of Vaccination Policies:** On August 30, the Somerville School Committee unanimously approved two new COVID vaccination-related policies.

- School Committee approved a measure that requires all SPS educators and staff to provide proof of full COVID-19 vaccination. Any district staff member or service provider who does not provide

proof of vaccination must submit to routine COVID-19 testing provided by the district and wear a kn95 or high-grade surgical mask which will be provided by the district, inside school buildings. Staff members will receive additional information and details on how to safely upload their proof of vaccination to a HIPAA-compliant system early next week.

- School Committee also approved a measure requiring all educators, staff, and vaccine-eligible students (12 years and older) participating in SPS non-academic extracurricular activities, including SPS Athletics, to provide proof of full COVID-19 vaccination. We will send information on how to provide proof of vaccination next week.

Vaccination is the most effective prevention strategy available for allowing schools to resume and sustain full in-person instruction. SPS will continue to [promote vaccinations](#) for eligible students (currently 12 and older), teachers, staff, and families through school-based and community vaccination opportunities offered by Somerville's Health and Human Services Department. The [next Vaccine Clinic](#) is scheduled for Wednesday, September 15, 2021 at 1:00 p.m. in front of Somerville High School.

## **PROGRAM UPDATES**

### **Math Acceleration for all Students**

As part of our commitment to ensuring equitable access to a rich and rigorous curriculum for all students, last year we convened a district-wide Math working group composed of Math educators in grades 8-12. The group spent the year examining the current Math placement structure and developing more equitable grade 9 Math placement guidelines that expand access and increase rigor for all rising 9th grade students. In the elementary schools, each Math unit has built-in extensions to challenge all students in deeper and more rigorous problem solving related to the grade level standards. We believe these changes will lead to a stronger Mathematics experience for all students and therefore will no longer be offering a separate Math Acceleration program. We appreciate your support and partnership as we continue our important and necessary equity work.

### **Becoming a Man (BAM) Program at SHS and Next Wave/Full Circle**

After introducing Becoming a Man (BAM) at the Healey School last year, we are excited to be expanding BAM to Somerville High School and Next Wave/Full Circle. Youth Guidance's BAM® (Becoming a Man®) program is a school-based group counseling program that guides young men in grades 7-12 to learn, internalize and practice social cognitive skills, make responsible decisions for their future and become positive members of their school and community. BAM integrates clinical theory and practice, men's rites of passage work, and a dynamic approach to youth engagement. Each session is built around a lesson plan designed to develop a specific skill through stories, role-playing and group exercises, raising aspirations for the future and developing a sense of personal responsibility and integrity.

Enjoy the beautiful weather this weekend.

Respectfully,

Mary Skipper, Superintendent