



**CITY OF SOMERVILLE**  
**JOSEPH A. CURTATONE**  
**MAYOR**



**MASSACHUSETTS**  
**MARY SKIPPER**  
**SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS**

November 16, 2020

Dear SPS Families and Staff,

As you know, we have been planning for a gradual re-entry to our schools as ventilation work on our school buildings is completed to bring buildings to within a Low Risk level of potential airborne transmission. Along with the building ventilation work, we have also developed a comprehensive COVID-19 testing plan for students and staff, and put in place health and safety protocols in our school buildings that align with CDC guidelines for when students and staff are back in our schools.

Unfortunately, we learned over the weekend that ventilation materials and equipment shortages will require us to delay our school reopening start date, originally scheduled for December 3rd for Group 1 buildings, by at least several weeks. At this point, we do not anticipate being able to reopen any of our school buildings prior to January 2021.

Somerville's Department of Infrastructure and Asset Management is working closely with the contractor and is expecting a new projected timeline for Group 1 buildings from the contractor tomorrow. As a reminder, buildings were grouped based on the estimated time that it would take to complete the necessary ventilation work to bring each building to within the Low Risk range. The first group of schools scheduled to be completed are the Argenziano, Capuano, and West Somerville Neighborhood School. The new Somerville High School is slated to be ready for occupancy in January.

We know that this is frustrating and disappointing news. We share your disappointment and will continue to do everything we can to expedite the building work so that we can safely start to bring our students and staff back to our classrooms. You also have our assurance that we will continue to be transparent and keep you informed throughout this process. Work on finalizing contracts and work schedules for Group 2 schools (high school mods and East Somerville Community School) and Group 3 schools (Kennedy, Healey, Winter Hill) is also continuing to move forward. That work is slightly ahead of schedule of the initial timelines.

As we have repeatedly emphasized, our focus has been on planning for a safe and sustainable reopening of our schools. That means ensuring that we meet all the guidelines that we have established for the gradual reopening of our schools to minimize the risk to students and staff, and to minimize the disruption that multiple school openings and closings can cause. As we have continued to hear over the last several weeks, this virus is unrelenting, making our thorough and cautious approach all the more important. As we have all learned, there are no easy answers to this pandemic and the challenges it continues to present.

Once we have a more definite timeline of when buildings will be ready, we will determine how and where we can begin phasing in students based on the priority groups identified in the District's Reopening Plan. Students designated as High Needs Special Education will be prioritized first, followed by students identified as English language learners at Levels 1 or 2 in our Sheltered English Immersion Program, then Pre-K and Kindergarten students. We will work closely with the Infrastructure and Asset Management



team to see how we can safely get high needs special education and English language learners in as early as possible in the New Year.

Because of the uncertainty that we are facing with building reopening, we are postponing the staff COVID-19 baseline testing that was scheduled to take place November 18, 19, 20, and 23 to a later date to be determined. We will also be rescheduling the November 30/December 1 baseline testing for students and staff to a later date. We will advise students and staff of new dates for those baseline tests once a firm schools reopening date has been set.

We will keep you updated on a weekly basis and expect to schedule our next Schools Reopening Town Hall event for some time in early or mid-December. Updates will also be made at the December 7th and 21st School Committee meetings. Thank you again for all that you continue to do to support Somerville kids, and for your patience and partnership during this unprecedented time.

Respectfully,

Mayor Joseph A. Curtatone  
Superintendent Mary E. Skipper  
School Committee Chair Carrie Normand

