



MALDEN PUBLIC SCHOOLS
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To the Malden Public School Community:

Believe it or not, it's just about back-to-school time for our students and educators! Although it might not feel like the traditional return, we are nonetheless excited to welcome back our school community. Our first day for staff will be Monday, August 31st. After 10 days of professional development around safety training, curriculum and instruction, remote learning, social emotional learning, trauma sensitive practices, technology and more, the first day for our students will be on Wednesday, September 16th.

A lot of things feel fluid right now, and it's hard for us as a community to be comfortable with the uncomfortable. The School Committee is working as quickly as possible in partnership with the School Department to finalize negotiations with the Malden Education Association (MEA) so that we can return to learning in the district. That process may seem long, but we appreciate the partnership of our educators in the district and know that we're working toward a safe and productive re-entry for our students and staff.

Here are a few important updates from the district:

The Early Learning Center

In May, the School Committee made the decision to support keeping the Early Learning Center open and fully functional while we waited for what the future held. As the situation progressed and our re-entry plans were finalized, the picture became clearer. As we begin the 2020-2021 school year, we are committed to providing our students and families at the ELC remote services that they can engage with from home. We also realize the expectation for a preschooler to be at a computer screen for extended periods of time is unrealistic, and the day/activities will be modified accordingly. **During this remote period, we would not expect any family to pay tuition to the ELC.** If and when we are able to transition to a hybrid model, the number of students in the building will also be far smaller and require less staffing.

The decision to have programming be tuition-free at the ELC creates a 1.2 million dollar budget deficit for the district. The School Committee decided that in order to save costs for our ELC families, and to avoid making any budget cuts we will be transferring 7 teachers, and 17 paraprofessionals from the ELC into open positions in our K-8 schools for a one year period. This was an incredibly difficult decision, however we are committed to keeping those staff members from the ELC employed in the Malden Public Schools, and are fortunate to be able to

provide a temporary, cost-neutral option for what would have created a very large deficit for the district to handle.

We will continue to connect and communicate with our ELC families over the coming weeks as we welcome a new Principal to the ELC community and plan for our remote fall together. Currently, here's what we know:

- If you are a general education student in the ELC who has already paid a deposit, you will receive a refund
- Since the School Committee voted to begin the year remotely for all students, until they vote to transition the district into a hybrid model for all students, general education students at the ELC will be able to participate in some remote activities which we are currently developing.
- To reiterate, programming for those general education PreK students will be tuition free
- We are still working to provide in-person services for our highest-need Special Education students, if families decide to choose into that option
- We anticipate more information coming within the following week for our ELC families about what to expect for a remote option - please stay tuned!

Our Highest Needs Learners

As we have stated since our decision to begin the year remotely, the School Committee is committed to providing the option of in-person instruction to our highest needs learners. Our students in substantially separate settings truly benefit from in-person educators who can work with the unique needs of their students and provide the therapeutic services they require. Of course, families will still be able to have their students participate remotely if they choose to do so.

With the full student body starting in a remote model, it will be much easier to take appropriate safety precautions and socially distance with our high-needs students onsite. We are currently in the process of negotiating that return with the MEA, but are hopeful that in early October we will be able to begin welcoming these students back in a hybrid model.

The staff who are present will have full access to personal protection equipment (PPE) like smocks, gloves, gowns, masks, and face shields - to name a few. There are many more precautions that will be taking place and while we are planning we appreciate the advocacy of both our School Committee members and partners in the MEA to keep safety a top priority.

Routine and Rigor

We have heard loudly and clearly from our families that with the new year beginning remotely, having structured routines and some added rigor for our students was a high priority. Our Assistant Superintendent Kelly Chase has been working hard with the curriculum directors and principals to make sure that the school day that students experience when they return on September 16th resembles as close to a "normal" school day structure as possible. There will be synchronous (real-time) and asynchronous (independent) learning activities every day, and the curriculum will be matched to our state frameworks and aligned grade-level to grade-level.

The expectation will be that students use Google Classroom as the main platform for learning, and Google Meet will be utilized as the district preferred communication method (the upcoming updates to the platform itself look very promising and helpful to our students and staff). There will be time built in for educators to check in with students and families, and communication will be prioritized at both the classroom and school level.

Free Breakfast and Lunch

As we outlined in our most recent School Committee meeting, free breakfast and lunch pickup will continue through Friday, September 11th in its current form. Thanks to the leadership of Business Manager Toni Mertz and Food Services Director Omar Hernandez, breakfast and lunch pickup will resume on Monday, September 14th; however, more announcements about the specifics around this essential community service will be forthcoming. We are excited that this program will continue for our Malden families into the school year.

Technology

We've said it before, but it's worth repeating - every student in the Malden Public Schools will have access to both a device and internet for the upcoming school year. Thanks to the leadership of Business Manager Toni Mertz and Director of Instructional Technology Natalia Brennan, no student will be without technology access this fall. As opposed to the spring where devices were given out primarily per family, we will have a touch-screen device for all students in PreK through Grade 1, and a chromebook for all students in Grades 2 - 12. If you do not have internet access, we will be able to provide you with a hotspot for internet access. The orders for these devices were made as early as possible, and while we await deliveries of devices, know that we will keep you apprised of developments within the next week. We recognize that families have varying levels of experience with technology devices and the platforms used on them. To that end, we are planning ways to provide families with easily accessible tech support and assistance in understanding and using tools and platforms that will help them work with their students to access their learning - more details are forthcoming!

What the Future Holds

The uncertainty of the future is challenging. We know that there are many families who are feeling an additional strain right now, and want to make sure we partner with you as effectively as we can to make sure we make this year as productive as it can be for our students. Our goal has been and will continue to be the safety of our students and staff. We want to return to school - in a safe and healthy manner. Throughout our negotiations process, we have consistently emphasized that principle and will continue to do so.

Currently, we are putting in the work of independently auditing our HVAC systems in our buildings, as well as ordering necessary safety supplies and supports for a potential return. Of course, any return to our physical buildings will be reliant upon health and safety metrics provided by the city and the state, our percent positivity rate as a community, successful consultation with our Board of Health, and other additional considerations that all will ultimately guide our decision to potentially transition from a remote phase to a hybrid phase. As we move forward together, please know that any official plans and communications will come from our department, the Malden Public Schools, and we will strive to be as communicative as possible.

as we navigate this uncharted territory together. We anticipate the release of another update within the next week.

As we get ready to begin the year together, we look forward to partnering with you to create the best experience we can for our learners.

Stay safe,

John Oteri