

Belmont Public Schools  
644 Pleasant St.  
Belmont, Massachusetts

Office of the Superintendent

February 23, 2021

Dear Belmont Community,

On behalf of the Belmont Return to In-Person Learning Working Group, I write with an update to the community. The Working Group met for the first time on Monday, February 22, 2021. We would like to update you on what we did in that meeting, the work completed thus far and an update on where we are headed.

The charge of the Working Group is to develop tools that support Belmont Public Schools in determining when and how to bring more students back to in-person learning. The Working Group is very much interested in determining ways, to the extent possible, to expand in-person learning as safely and as quickly as possible-which may include this year. The Working Group will be making rolling recommendations to the Superintendent as soon as they are able, and I expect to receive some initial recommendations on a return to in-person learning for grade levels of students over the next few weeks. The team will continue to work over the next few months to make recommendations as the Working Group discusses and analyzes opportunities across the grade spans.

### **Composition of Team**

The Belmont Return to In-person Learning Working Group met for the first time on Monday, February 22. The team is represented by a diverse group of Belmont community members including students, parents/guardians, health experts, School Committee members, school district educators, and citizens of the Town of Belmont. A table outlining the 31-person Working Group membership is included at the end of this letter.

### **Agenda for Meeting 1**

The agenda for Meeting 1 was:

1. Opening and Welcome
2. Introductions
3. Review of Major Guidance Documents to Guide Return to In-person Learning Strategy and Discussions (CDC, DESE, US Department of Education and T.H. Chan School of Public Health)
4. Ideation of Possible Solutions in Small Groups
5. Discussion of Next Steps

### **Deeper Dive into Meeting Content**

- ***Review of Reports:*** The team reviewed a summary from four key guidance documents outlining the recommendations from various agencies about how to support a return to in-person learning. You can find these slides in the [Week 1 slides](#) (slide 5-11). I draw your attention to Slide 11. Slide 11 comes from the CDC and outlines recommended K-12 mitigation strategies based on levels of

community transmission. Thereafter, the facilitators asked members of the working group with a background in epidemiology, public health policy, and medicine/nursing to offer their insights and expertise.

- [Week 1 Slides](#)
- Major Guidance Documents:
  - [CDC: Operational Strategy for K-12 Schools through Phased Mitigation](#)
  - [CDC: Overview of Operational Strategy for K-12 Schools through Phased Mitigation](#)
  - [Department of Education \(federal\): ED COVID-19 Handbook, Volume 1: Strategies for Safely Reopening Elementary and Secondary Schools](#)
  - [MA DESE: Initial Fall Reopening Guidance](#)
  - [Chan School of Public Health: Schools for Health: Risk Reduction Strategies for Reopening Schools](#)
- ***Immediate Focus on K-2:*** The Working Group is focused initially on expanding in-person learning for [K-2 students](#) (see slide 17) This focus is driven by:
  - Guidance from the CDC and DESE that prioritizes in-person return for elementary students
  - Self-contained structures of these classes, with limited interactions between classes
  - Enrollment and remote/hybrid selection data shows more immediate opportunity for full in-person return at the elementary level

The Working Group reviewed the current elementary instructional schedule and a sample classroom structure.

The Working Group will extend applicable learning and solutions from the K-2 grade bands to subsequent grade bands in future weeks, while also tackling the unique challenges that arise for other grade levels.

- ***Ideation:*** The larger working group split into five subgroups to discuss possible models for increasing access to in-person learning. These teams were organized to analyze the following:
  1. Classroom capacity to expand from half-day to full-day in-person for all K-2 students who opt for in-person learning;
  2. Non-classroom capacity (e.g. lunch, specials, transitions) to expand from half-day to full-day in-person for all K-2 students who opt for in-person learning;
  3. Classroom capacity to expand to 4-5 in-person days/week with no cohorts) for all K-2 students who opt for in-person-learning;
  4. Non-classroom capacity (e.g. lunch, specials, transitions) to expand to 4-5 in-person days/week (no cohorts); and
  5. Transportation capacity to support an expansion from half-day to full-day in-person or to a 4-5 in person/days/week.

Small groups discussed their assigned topics by focusing on:

- Challenges and barriers
- Potential Solutions
- Assumptions-- What else do we need to know to determine if our models are viable?
- Additional Resources Discussed in Groups:
  - [Current Elementary Schedules](#)
  - [K-4 Classroom Capacity Data | 2-22-2021 \(Updated\)](#)
  - School Floor Plans

- Burbank
- Butler
- Wellington
- Winn Brook
- [DESE Transportation Guidance](#)

**Next Steps:**

- *March 1 Meeting:* Subgroups will further ideate their models with additional information they have requested based on assumptions. Each subgroup should be positioned to present their proposed K-2 solutions by the close of the March 1 meeting. I expect a set of K-2 recommendations would be forthcoming after the March 1 meeting.
- *Focus Throughout March and April:* After K-2 recommendations are made to the Superintendent the working group will turn their attention to other important topics:
  - K-2 in-person learning expansion
  - Applying learning from K-2 work to other grade levels
  - Grades 3-4 in-person learning expansion
  - Progressing to additional grade spans across grades 5-12

Sincerely,



John P. Phelan  
Superintendent of Schools  
Town of Belmont