

BELMONT PUBLIC SCHOOLS

JOHN P. PHELAN
SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS
(617) 993-5401



ANTHONY R. DiCOLOGERO
DIRECTOR OF FINANCE,
BUSINESS & OPERATIONS
(617) 993-5430
FAX (617) 993-5439

JANICE G. DARIAS
ASSISTANT SUPERINTENDENT
FOR CURRICULUM & INSTRUCTION
(617) 993-5410

644 PLEASANT STREET
BELMONT, MASSACHUSETTS 02478-2589
(617) 993-5400
FAX (617) 993-5409

MICHAEL E. McALLISTER
DIRECTOR OF HUMAN CAPITAL
(617) 993-5425

March 4, 2021

Dear Belmont Community,

I am writing with our weekly update on the Return to In-Person Learning Working Group, and to share some thoughts on this very challenging year. I want to recognize that this has been a difficult year for students, as well as for parents and families. It has also been the most significant challenge our educators have ever faced. There are no easy answers as we battle COVID-19. I want to personally thank Belmont Public School educators for their tireless and extraordinary work on behalf of our children. I also want to thank the families of Belmont for the grace they have shown--and continue to show--as we work through this devastating public health crisis.

I want to share a few personal commitments at this point in the year. First, I am committed to finishing this school year better than we started. I am committed to returning students back to school as **safely** and quickly as possible starting with our youngest learners at the elementary schools. Finally, I am committed to a strong fully in-person start of the school year in September 2021. I will be working tirelessly, along with the entire Belmont Public School community, to deliver on these commitments.

I am encouraged by the work I've observed from the Return to In-Person Learning Working Group. In light of last week's announcements from Commissioner Riley (see [here](#) for the update I sent last week) the Working Group has shifted its focus. Rather than working on finding ways to increase the in-person hours in the elementary hybrid schedule, we are now developing a plan for a full, in-person option for K-4 students. We will maintain a remote option and eliminate the hybrid option. The working group met on Monday and began building recommendations in subgroups which focused on physical distancing and classroom capacity, lunch and snack, specials and specialized instruction, remote-only options, and transportation.

Since Monday's Working Group meeting, central office leaders, principals and I have been reviewing the emerging recommendations from the Working Group and are currently pressure testing some of the recommendations. We are focused on establishing the conditions for physical distancing in classroom and non-classroom space. We are also focused on addressing concerns related to the remote-only experience for those students and families that select to remain remote for the rest of the year. The Working Group will also take stock of current PPE equipment and make any recommendations on new investments as we ready for a return to increased in-person learning. You can find materials related to the Working Group [here](#).

The Working Group will meet again on Monday, March 8th and will hope to issue recommendations by the end of that meeting. Assuming that happens, I will present those recommendations, detailing the remote and in-person plans, at the School Committee meeting on Tuesday. Because we want families to have an opportunity to fully understand each learning option (in-person or remote) **we plan to hold a**

Q&A session with school administrators on Thursday, March 11th at 6:30pm. This session will be recorded and made available to those who cannot attend at that time. We will then send out a survey to parents on Friday, March 12, so that they can decide whether they would like to choose the remote or in-person option for their child. The survey will be due Wednesday, March 17 and this selection will be binding for the remainder of the school year.

Monday, March 8th – Working Group meeting and possible recommendations
Tuesday, March 9th – Recommendations presented to at School Committee Meeting
Thursday, March 11th – Q&A session with school administrators
Friday, March 12th – Survey to all K-4 parents asking for remote/in-person choice
Wednesday, March 17th - Survey due by 5:00pm

After the Working Group finalizes its K-4 recommendations it will then move into discussions of how to increase in-person learning at the middle and high schools. Specifically, the Working Group will start with grade 5 by leveraging their recommendations from the K-4 given the self-contained grade 5 model which is more similar to our elementary schools. I will continue to update the community as we move forward in these next discussions.

I appreciate and acknowledge that change can be disruptive and that these plans will be met with happiness by some and concern by others. I look forward to working together to deliver on three big commitments: finish the year better than we started; return more students to in-person learning this spring; and focus on a full in-person start to the year in the fall. As always, please feel free to contact me with questions or thoughts.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'John P. Phelan', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

John P. Phelan
Superintendent of Schools
Town of Belmont