

April 14, 2021

Dear Belmont Families,

Now that we have plans in place to provide all students the option of full-time, in-person school, I would like to report on the conclusion of our Return to In-Person Learning Working Group.

As you recall, this group was formed in February 2021 to develop tools that would support Belmont Public Schools in determining when and how to bring more students back to in-person learning with a corresponding and robust remote learning option for students who choose not to immediately come back to school buildings. The group was largely successful in achieving these goals; by the end of this month every student who wants to be in a full-time, in-person model will have the opportunity to do so. That we are achieving this goal in a safe, educationally sound manner is in large part due to the thoughtful input of the Working Group.

The Working Group met Monday night for a wrap-up [meeting](#) and opportunity to reflect on the process and outcome of our work. We reviewed the status and implementation updates of each school in our district. We also looked at the data of students who had chosen in-person and remote by grade level, educational subgroups, and race/ethnicity.

I am very thankful to the Working Group not only for the productive ideas and feedback that it generated, but also for the way it modeled a collaborative community conversation for all of us. Bringing together people from various perspectives during a time of heightened community tension could have aggravated the stress of the pandemic. Instead, this group pushed to understand all of the complexities involved in our district and worked productively and respectfully to incorporate the many perspectives, concerns, and ideas represented by all group members into our plans. Of course, this could not have happened without the expert moderation provided by our group facilitators, Drew Echelson and Michelle Rinehart. I am deeply grateful to them for their guidance and support.

The advent of spring, the return of many students to school, the opportunity for educators and others to be vaccinated -- these all feel like important steps toward finishing the year on a positive note. I acknowledge that we have had difficult moments and many hard conversations along the way, and I look forward to ending the year stronger than we began.

I am currently working with our administrative team to determine how we might continue to draw upon the Working Group's expertise in the future. We are committed to starting school in September 2021 with full, in-person school. We also realize that this pandemic is not over and that there are still many health, safety, and educational implications to consider, including seasonal weather issues, students with special medical situations as defined by DESE, and the possibility of changing CDC or DESE guidance. We hope to engage the Working Group as we continue to develop full plans for all potential scenarios. I will update you on our next steps as soon as they are determined and look forward to your partnership and feedback as we move forward.

Respectfully,

John P. Phelan  
Superintendent of Schools