

Dear Parents/Guardians and Staff:

Today marks the beginning of the final week of school for the 2020-2021 school year, and what a year it has been! This fall, we dealt with our first public health crisis – EEE, that upset our plans for outdoor PE classes, recess, and fall sports. Today, we enter the fourth month of isolation to curb the spread of the coronavirus, which has taken the lives of almost 120,000 Americans including two deaths here in Holliston. The disruption of our school year has been unprecedented and significant. Despite Herculean effort on the part of Holliston's educators, it is undeniable that remote learning has not and cannot replace the in-person education experience.

While some restrictions on our everyday living are slowly being lifted, educational leaders from across Massachusetts are being encouraged to develop alternative plans in the likely event that 100% in-person, in-school instruction will likely not be possible at the beginning of next school year. To assist us in this planning, the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) is supposed to publish guidelines for school districts to follow when planning for the fall. Initially, we were told that those guidelines were expected to be published today, June 15, but in a conference call late last week, the commissioner said that "preliminary" guidelines would "hopefully be published next [now, this] week, followed by more detailed guidelines coming in early-to-mid July." While this news is frustrating, we all have to recognize that, in Massachusetts, these decisions are being informed by the best scientific and medical minds in our country and that a lot will depend on the exact trajectory the virus is taking when school is scheduled to reopen in late August.

I know the frustration the families are feeling, facing the idea that next school year may look different than "normal" but without any idea as to what the exact differences will be. With that in mind, I would like to offer a few concepts that are highly likely to pervade the next school year:

1. Students and staff will likely be required to wear masks and practice physical distancing throughout the school day. Parents should expect that it will be their responsibility to provide their students with masks.
2. The availability of morning and afternoon bus transportation may be limited in order to implement physical distancing requirements. Students and staff who are exhibiting **any** physical symptoms of illness will be expected to stay home.
3. The practice of giving your child some Tylenol when they wake up with a little fever and sending them off to school will not be tolerated, as it now could have life-threatening consequences to others.
4. It is virtually certain that there will be some school days when some students will be required to stay at home and actively participate in remote learning. It is likely that some students will experience this more than others, as we accommodate and adjust our programming to meet individual student's learning needs.
5. Remote Learning may look quite different next year than it did this year. For example, in the scenario where some students are in school and some are not, the opportunity exists to live stream lessons as they occur in the classroom, where in today's model that is not possible.
6. Schools and districts may have to adjust their instructional model, moving back-and-forth from 100% remote, to hybrid, to 100% in-school, depending on the status of the virus. For example, if we were to open under a hybrid model (with some students coming to school and some students remaining at home) at the beginning of the school year, we might have to move to a 100% remote model if Massachusetts experiences a second wave of the virus. Similarly, when a vaccine is available and the danger passes, we could move to the 100% in-school model.

These past months have been difficult for all of us. What was once easy is now difficult, or still not possible. This has required us all to demonstrate high levels of patience and understanding as we adjust. When school opens in the fall, I am confident that we will all need to show the same high levels of patience and understanding as we work to bring as many students back to school as possible.

As the state publishes clearer information about their plans for the fall, the Holliston Public Schools will communicate those plans to you as soon as possible.

Respectfully,

Bradford L. Jackson, Ed.D.
Superintendent of Schools