



# OXFORD PUBLIC SCHOOLS

*“Sailing Toward Success”*

July 22, 2020

Dear Colleagues, Parents, and Guardians,

I am writing today to provide you with an update relevant to some preliminary decisions about fall school reopening approved by the School Committee at Monday night’s meeting. However, before I do that, I wish to share some results from last week’s survey. First, let me express my thanks for your quick responses to the surveys that were sent out to parents/guardians and staff. Over 90% of families and over 65% of staff responded. Responses from parents/guardians indicate that 82% of you preferred that your children return to school for some form of in-person learning. When asked about what specific model of schooling you prefer, 54% preferred in-person learning, 24% preferred a hybrid model, and 17% preferred remote learning. Also, when asked if the District implements a hybrid model, which model would you prefer, 53% of parents/guardians indicated they prefer the week-on/week-off model in lieu of the days-on/days-off model.

Staff responses also indicated their tremendous desire to return to work. However, there was no dominant preference for one learning model, with 30% of staff preferring in-person with restrictions, 29% preferring hybrid, 25% preferring remote, and 16% percent undecided. Both groups stated that they would like to see the district phase in any model.

Governor Baker, in conjunction with Commissioner Riley, has established clear guidance with their priority for getting ALL students back to school for in-person learning, all the while keeping the health and safety of students and staff at the forefront of planning, and allowing this decision to be made at the local level. DESE has asked each district to perform its own internal analysis above and beyond the space requirement analysis and including such areas as Covid-19 related costs, school operations, school scheduling, staffing, instruction and safety, to name a few.

In addition, DESE has directed districts to submit their reopening plans through the following two-step process:

**Step 1 by July 31:**

Districts will complete and submit a *preliminary reopening plan summary*. This two-part online form will provide DESE with key summary information about a district’s intent regarding fall reopening and other planning considerations.

**Step 2 by August 10:**

Districts must finalize their *comprehensive plan documents*, submit them to DESE and release them to their communities. This additional time will provide districts with the opportunity to make any desired changes based on additional guidance that DESE may release later.

4 MAPLE ROAD, OXFORD, MA 01540 · (508) 987-6050 · FAX (508) 987-6054 · TDD LINE (508) 987-6096

*The Oxford Public School District does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, sex, religion, national origin, sexual orientation, gender identity, disability, homelessness, pregnancy, pregnancy-related conditions, or limited English proficiency.*

With this said, we are well underway with work on our recommendation for a reopening model. The District's full administrative team, union leaders, the District's fall reopening planning team, fall reopening planning subcommittees, and the School Committee have engaged in review, discussion, and analysis, and will continue to do so.

Also, as part of this planning process and at DESE's request, districts conducted space feasibility studies to determine the number of students that could fit in a classroom working with the new DESE guidelines of three feet from seat edge to seat edge. We completed our space assessment last week and presented it to the School Committee at Monday night's meeting. Study results indicate that the District could meet the DESE safety restriction guidelines such that all students and staff would "fit" in all our schools. However, the more important question is not if all can "fit." The real question is whether, at this point in time, sending **all** students and staff back to school for in-person learning is safe and healthy and thus the right thing to do? The simple answer is "No." As we know, presently Massachusetts numbers are heading in the right direction. While early data provided by state medical experts to DESE point to children being less likely to transmit the virus, new medical data is emerging daily.

Thus, at Monday evening's School Committee meeting, I made the following recommendation for fall school reopening which was approved by the School Committee.

1. For at least through the **end of Term 1 (11/25)**, students/families will have two learning options for returning to school:

a. **Option 1:** Students/Families can elect to participate in a **hybrid learning model** (a blended model of in-person learning and remote learning). The outline of the hybrid model that will be offered is **Week On/Week Off**. Students will be divided into two groups, Cohort A and Cohort B. Cohort A will engage in in-person learning for one week while Cohort B engages in remote learning during that same week. The following week the two cohort groups would switch.

b. **Option 2:** Students/Families can elect to participate in **Oxford Public Schools Remote Learning Academy (OXPSRLA)**. This model is designed to respond primarily to the needs of families and students who have concerns about the health of their child or who have family members in high-risk categories. Students participating in OXPSRLA will, for the most part, be engaging in self-directed learning.

2. School for students will **start after Labor Day on September 8<sup>th</sup>**.

3. The return to school will be **phased-in** with careful consideration for preparation time for staff and orientation time for students and families.

More details that will define each model as well as the plan for high risk students (i.e., students with disabilities, ELL students, etc.) will be detailed when the final document is released to you by **August 10<sup>th</sup>**. Also, at a future time, your building principal or I will be providing more information about such things as safety and well-being protocols in schools, changes in building schedules, transportation, staffing, sports/activities, special education services, and technology.

Finally, while the guidance from DESE may seem straightforward, the complexities of educating all students is not. At the same time that we prepare for some form of return to school this fall, we must recognize that school as we all know it will not be the same and that there remain many uncertainties. While we can carefully lay out a plan, everything might change in an instant with a resurgence of the virus this fall.

There is no script for what public education has gone through during the last few months. There is no script for the immediate future. There are no easy solutions!

I ask that all of us remain flexible and adaptable. You will have many questions! We will have many answers, for some immediately. However, I ask for your patience and understanding while this country continues to be in the midst of a pandemic and while we continue to work on a plan that can best ensure the safety and well-being of students and staff.

With warmest regards,



Kristine E. Nash, Ed.D.

Interim Superintendent of Schools