



March 23, 2020

Dear BPS Community,

I hope you and your loved ones are well, and you have been able to find new ways to connect with one another. Yesterday, a psychologist posted on social media that we should be using the term “physical distancing,” rather than social distancing, since we are wired to connect socially and relationally. As we enter our second week of school closure, we have been considering ways to best support our students, educators and staff in the context of social and relational connectedness.

This letter contains information about a number of areas including, COVID-19 testing results, our BPS learning plan, and free meal service within the Governor’s stay-at-home advisory.

COVID-19 Testing Results

At this time, one positive case for a BPS member exists, and was previously reported by me to our BPS community. The positive case was a BCIS staff member who is recovering and is grateful for our community’s well wishes and support. On Friday, I reported the following number of either BPS staff or students testing for COVID-19: BCIS (3 staff), BHS (1 staff), BIS (2 staff), BUE (1 staff), WVE (1 student, 1 staff). As I write to you today, the following results have been reported to me: WVE student – negative, BHS staff member – negative, BCIS staff member – negative. We will be informed by public health if any of the staff who I have referenced above receive a positive result. As of this morning, 4 individuals in the Town of Barnstable have tested positive. None of the four are affiliated with BPS, as either a staff member or student. We are grateful for everyone’s efforts in keeping our community healthy.

In terms of future communication from me, I will be unable to communicate each time a staff member or student seeks testing. The overall testing rate is increasing (over 6,000 COVID-19 tests have been given to date in MA), and since schools closed on March 13, the need to self-quarantine as a result of possible school exposure ends this Friday (14 days from March 13). We are not always aware of BPS staff or students seeking testing. Of course, if I learn that a BPS staff member or student tests positive, I will alert the BPS community while maintaining the confidentiality of the individual. This follows my communication practice of alerting our BPS community when we had an employee test positive.

BPS Learning Plan

Our school calendar, as approved by the School Committee, includes five inclement weather days. The Commissioner of Education has waived make up day requirements as long as school districts use the five inclement weather days. This means the last day of school for BPS is June 24, 2020. Last week, we used four of the five inclement days (the first inclement weather day was October 17 due to the wind storm),



the equivalent of four “snow days.” As such, we asked that our employees use those days to care for themselves, and their loved ones, as we all try to adapt to our new normal. As we begin this week, we are launching elements of our BPS learning plan.

While Governor Baker has indicated schools are closed until April 7, it is reasonable to believe our closure will extend beyond the initial date. While parents/guardians may be aware of that other districts have launched extensive learning plans, our preference has been to consider the social emotional needs of our students, families, and staff. Barnstable Public Schools is one of a few districts that was directly impacted by a positive COVID-19 case, and our first priority has been to attend to the emotional well-being of our school community. In order to prioritize social and relational connectedness, we are phasing our approach as we implement our BPS learning plan. **It is important to note, we are adhering to the Commissioner of Education’s guidance that we offer enrichment learning opportunities, and avoid attempting to replicate our classrooms online.** Our first order of business within our learning plan is to ensure equity and access. We envision our learning plan in three phases:

- Phase 1 - Focus on equity of access to technology for BPS students and staff. Our school closure, and subsequent physical distancing, means that we will need to connect with our students, families and one another through technology.
- Phase 2 - Identify and organize resources for BPS families that are equitably accessible that will provide students with enrichment opportunities. The enrichment activities provide opportunities to establish rituals and routines for learning at home. However, they are referred to as enrichment activities because we cannot expect our BPS parents/guardians to home school their children. Additionally, state and federal guidance has indicated that k-12 public schools should not attempt to create “virtual schools.”
- Phase 3 – Begin to implement remote learning for BPS students with direct educator engagement to help students continue learning while schools are closed.

Phase 1 – Equitable access to technology

This week will begin the first phase of our learning plan. As part of this first stage we are focusing on equity of access to technology. To that end, we are **surveying families** with students in kindergarten through 7th grade to identify who does and does not have access to technology. Based on individual student need, we will be **distributing Chromebooks** from school-sites on March 26 and 27, with BCIS distribution taking place on March 31. (We are not surveying BHS students since they have 1:1 technology already in place.)

Phase 2 – Enrichment resources

Due to the efforts of the BPS teaching and learning subcommittee, we recently launched our



student/family resources page (<https://www.barnstable.k12.ma.us/site/Default.aspx?PageID=4878>), which focuses on providing students and families with **access to rich and engaging learning opportunities**. This web page is a work in progress and our teaching and learning subcommittee will be adding to it over the next week or so, including other family support and informational resources. Please help us spread the word by sharing the page!

Phase 3 – Remote learning for BPS students

Coordinators and directors of teaching and learning have been reaching out to staff to collect the next round of resources to be shared via the web page. This information will be synthesized and organized by the coordinators/directors to be shared out later this week. We are also planning for longer term school closure which will mean that direct educator engagement will be necessary to help students continue learning while schools are closed. We will provide an update as remote learning plans and expectations are collaboratively developed, and while we continue to receive state and federal guidance from educational agencies.

Meal service and Governor Baker’s stay-at-home advisory

Today, Governor Baker issued a stay-at-home advisory. Residents are advised to stay home and avoid unnecessary travel and other unnecessary activities during this two-week time period. During this period of time BPS will continue with meal services as previously published at four school sites, and bus stop locations, as an essential service to our community. Our food service workers continue with precautionary measures, and our families and students have been terrific about practicing physical distancing at all sites.

In closing, families and students can expect to hear from their building leaders regarding our BPS learning plan, as well as other school related matters. Please continue to either contact your building principal or me, if we can answer questions, or if we can help you in any way. Thank you for your continued patience as we consider and plan what our school closure experience means for our students, staff, and families. And, most of all, thank you for all that you are doing to keep our community healthy and resilient.

Be well,

Dr. Meg Mayo-Brown, Superintendent of Schools