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August 18, 2020

**Re: Reopening Update 8/18/20**

To the Dracut Public School Community:

As I have been this doing regularly, this summer, below you will find updates on a number of issues related to the opening of schools in September:

**COVID Data:** As of late last week, the Department of Public Health (DPH) introduced a new metric by which school districts may consider the state of the virus in a city or town. This metric would help determine if schools should be opened or remain open. The metric is the *Average Daily Incidence Rate per 100,000* cases. The metric is tied to a dashboard where weekly, each community in the state is rated on a Green (low incidence), Yellow, or Red (higher incidence) scale (with the inclusion of a White level for very small towns). **As of August 12<sup>th</sup>, Dracut has a Green designation, with an Average Daily Incidence Rate per 100,000 of 2.2.**

Further, in considering Massachusetts, many may have seen my discussion at last Monday's public hearing, where I showed a snapshot of the seven-day rolling average of positive tests in the state. At that time Massachusetts was one of a handful of states with sufficiently low rates that it is considered safe to open schools with a 2.72% average. Since then, the rate has **decreased to 1.6%**. At the state and local levels, the metrics are positive and according to the state, continue to indicate an environment in which schools should reopen.

**Remote Learning Academy:** Progress has been made with respect to the structure of the Remote Learning Academy, our full remote option for students who will not return to a school building in the fall.

- The Remote Learning Academy will be supervised by David Hill, our Director of Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment.
- The program will be supported by Dracut educators.
- The district has purchased a learning management platform (*Edgenuity*) to support educators and students. This platform's curriculum is aligned with the Massachusetts Frameworks and may be supplemented with local curriculum at the discretion of teachers and administrators.
- Planning continues, but students may be able to participate in some non-core courses (specials/electives) with educators supporting the school-based hybrid cohorts. More information on this portion of the program will be forthcoming.
- In order to maintain continuity of services, **elementary students (K-5) who are enrolled in the Remote Learning Academy must remain enrolled through at least the end of the 1<sup>st</sup> trimester (December 11, 2020).**
- Parents/guardians will be required to notify the Curriculum Office of their intent for the 2<sup>nd</sup> trimester no later than Friday, November 20, 2020 regarding whether their child will continue in the full remote program or be placed in a hybrid cohort (week-in, week-remote).
- In order to maintain continuity of services, **secondary students (6-12) who are enrolled in the Remote Learning Academy must remain enrolled through at least the end of the 1<sup>st</sup> semester (January 29, 2021).**

- Parents/guardians will be required to notify the Curriculum Office of their intent for the 2<sup>nd</sup> semester no later than January 8, 2021 regarding whether their child will continue in the full remote program or be placed in a school-based hybrid cohort.
- In my recent discussions about a full remote option I had indicated that approximately 1/3 of parents/guardians had not responded to either a survey or direct phone calls by school personnel to determine what students would be enrolled in hybrid cohorts or the Remote Learning Academy. As of this writing very few additional parents have communicated with our schools about their intent. I certainly understand everyone's angst as we close in on the start of the school year, but planning cannot be finalized without knowing the intent of parents.
- Given the extraordinarily tight timeline administrators and staff are working under, **parents must indicate their intent no later than the close of business, Friday, August 21, 2020. Any students not designated by parents by that date will be assigned to a school-based hybrid cohort.**
- More details will be released as plans are finalized.
- Questions related to the Remote Learning Academy should be directed to Mr. Hill ([dhill@dracutps.org](mailto:dhill@dracutps.org)) or at 957-2617.

**Hybrid Cohort Assignments:** Many parents are communicating with schools to find out in which cohort their child/children have been placed. As referenced above, while empathetic to the concerns of parents, without knowing the intent of 1/3 of parents/guardians, building principals cannot complete cohort lists. I can assure you that principals will release the list as soon as they are completed.

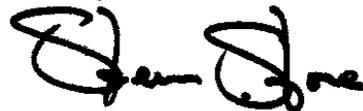
**Bus Passes:** In past years, a grace period has been allowed before bus passes were checked. **This year, bus passes will be checked on the first day of school. Students without a pass will not be allowed on a school bus.** Please understand we are obligated to tightly manage the capacity of buses. There will be no exceptions to this process. Parents are strongly urged to purchase a pass immediately.

**Dracut Public Schools App:** As of today only 450 people (in a district with nearly 3,800 students) have downloaded the district's app from the Apple or Play Stores. Our new app is integrated with our website and automated call system and provides for push notifications on phones. More than ever before, it is vital that parents/guardians stay connected with the district so that announcements and information can be received in real time. I urge you to download the app today.

As always, I thank you for your continued patience. Please know that everyone is working as hard as they can to prepare for an unprecedented school year. Please feel free to contact me directly at [sstone@dracutps.org](mailto:sstone@dracutps.org) if you have any questions.

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Sincerely,



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Superintendent of Schools