

Christopher J. Malone, C.A.G.S.
Superintendent (978) 640-7800
cmalone@tewksbury.k12.ma.us

Brenda Theriault-Regan, C.A.G.S.
Assistant Superintendent (978) 640-7800
bregan@tewksbury.k12.ma.us



Celebrating Excellence



July 23, 2020

Dear Tewksbury Parents, Guardians and Staff Members,

First of all, I want to thank you all for your patience and understanding as we take on the daunting task of making the determination of the best way to safely have students return to school in the fall. I would like to outline the specific work being done now to prepare for this fall and the decision timeline that will take place over the next few weeks.

From the onset of preparing for reopening in the fall, all school districts in Massachusetts were informed that, “85% of the decisions made specific to reopening (to include which model of re-opening) would be made at the state level”. As of last week, the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) informed all school districts that local school committees would now be making the individual decision for each district regarding which model (in-person, hybrid, or remote learning). Although the district has been working diligently to develop all three models, the determination of who makes the final decision is new information.

The Tewksbury Reopening Task Force has been meeting weekly to further examine specific elements of the three models and have begun the process of looking at the practical application of these models for students, families and staff members. The Task Force, which includes our Town Manager, Police Chief, Fire Chief, Town Health Department medical personnel, parents, administrators, school lead nurse, and union representatives from the teachers/aides, custodians and secretaries, has reviewed all DESE guidance specific to reopening schools in the fall. Additionally, the Task Force has examined recent surveys of parents and staff members to help frame their discussion.

DESE Commissioner Jeffrey Riley has asked all districts as part of his “Initial Fall Reopening Guidance.. to prioritize in-person instruction” and to “*hold off on announcing any final decisions about what reopening will look like for the fall for your district until early August*”. As a result, DESE has required districts to submit “*one reopening plan that will address health and safety requirements and different student learning models - in-person, hybrid, and remote learning...to include special populations*” by July 31st. As of July 15th, districts were notified that by August 10th “*they must finalize comprehensive plan documents, submit them to DESE and release them publicly to their communities.*”

With the use of parent and teacher surveying (the response rate has been great, please watch for more – thank you!) the District Leadership Team and the Reopening Task Force have worked very hard to inform and develop the three-tiered, preliminary opening plan for July 31st and we will share that when complete.

TPS District Strategy

The Tewksbury Public Schools community believes that our educational program will encompass a 21st century teaching and learning approach that promotes consistent growth among our students and staff to achieve academic, social, and emotional success for all students.

The final determination of reopening will be made by the school committee prior to August 10th. There are challenges to any model the district may adopt and likely, no matter which model is determined, there will be people disappointed, particularly in not knowing what their childcare situation will be until August 10th. Some of those challenges that the District Leadership Team and Reopening Task Force are facing include:

- Improving the remote learning experience for students and families regardless of the model.
- Ability to provide transportation with COVID-19 restrictions.
- Initial survey data that shows 92% of parents favoring a full in-person return to school but only 34% of teachers feeling that is the BEST option.
- Additional space, personal protective equipment, and medical procedures that will be difficult to adhere to and costly.
- Balancing the specific guidance coming from DESE and the concerns of the Tewksbury Teachers Association.

The School Committee will be conducting a workshop on Wednesday, August 5th, beginning at 1:00 PM in conjunction with the Reopening Task Force and the District Leadership Team. This workshop will be available for viewing to the public. Parents/guardians and residents should feel free to email me directly at cmalone@teewksbury.k12.ma.us with any comments or questions you would like to be considered as part of the workshop. A School Committee meeting has been scheduled the following day, Thursday, August 6th, for a vote on the final plan to be submitted to the State on August 10th.

Once again, this timeline is short and there is a great deal of information to consider. The safety of the students, staff, and families are our priority no matter which model is determined and your patience and understanding during this time is very much appreciated.

Sincerely,

Chris Malone

Christopher J. Malone
Superintendent of Schools

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