

**MISSION:** To provide opportunities and pathways in a safe, supportive and technology-rich environment that engage, challenge and inspire students to achieve college and career readiness and to contribute to our 21<sup>st</sup> century community.

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SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS

## SWANSEA PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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July 30, 2020

Dear Swansea Community,

I am writing with an update on our planning process for the start of a new school year in the Swansea Public Schools. Our original start date for students (September 1) will be changing based upon an agreement between Massachusetts Department of Education and the state teacher unions to allow for extra days of training prior to students entering school. An updated start date is forth coming.

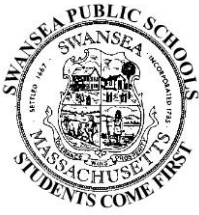
Our planning process continues to be guided by a vigilant monitoring of public health data in Massachusetts. The Commonwealth's careful and disciplined approach has enabled our state gradually to begin reopening, in part because of strong compliance with health and safety precautions.

The Massachusetts Department of Education has directed districts to submit by July 31, 2020, a preliminary plan that addresses the feasibility of three options for serving students at the start of the school year. Those options include a full return to daily, in-person attendance, a hybrid plan combining in-school learning with some remote learning, and finally, a 100% remote learning program. Each district's final plan, approved by the School Committee, is due to the department by August 10. Given the significant changes these plans will require in the way schools operate, we also must work closely with Swansea educators to ensure the plan that is selected can be implemented appropriately an in accord with contractual obligations.

Of course, we know that under normal circumstances, students would be best served in schools every day, interacting with their peers and engaged in live classroom learning. While our educators and families worked incredibly hard last spring to implement remote learning, we know that approach presented enormous challenges, did not reach all students (particularly those with the greatest needs), and is not an adequate substitute for in-person interaction with teachers. When out of school, our students also lack access to all the social, emotional and academic supports that help ensure their social-emotional well-being, particularly in navigating the effects of trauma during these tremendously challenging times. Therefore, we believe our families and students deserve more than a fully remote learning plan.

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In order to adhere to the school re-opening guidance provided by DESE, consistent with recommendations from the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and the American Pediatric Association, we also do not believe we can safely meet physical distancing requirements with all students and staff in the buildings at the same time. **However, we do believe we can make significant changes in our school schedules and operating procedures to make a partial return to in-person learning both safe and successful.** This approach will require strategies to ensure physical distancing, as well as a series of other critical health and safety measures, including wearing face coverings, washing hands frequently, cleaning and sanitizing facilities, screening regularly for symptoms of illness, and staying home from school when sick, among others. Our planning process includes a comprehensive set of strategies and investments to minimize the risk of transmitting the virus.

As a result, we will pursue a hybrid learning plan, which would bring the students back into school buildings for in-person instruction in smaller, socially distanced groups on a rotating basis, combined with a robust remote learning program on the days students are not scheduled to be physically in school. This plan also enables us to bring a subset of students in greatest need of in-person instruction and support, particularly students with disabilities, back to school every day – but also in smaller, distanced settings with all other precautions in place.

We recognize that the circumstances of every family and staff member are different, and that no plan ultimately will satisfy everyone in our community. But rest assured that we are working diligently to explore every option available to us, that we remain guided by the science to keep our students and staff safe and healthy, and that we will be prepared to make adjustments along the way if the public health conditions or other variables change over time.

We will keep you informed about our progress in developing a final plan. We will continue to post updates on our website and social media. I am confident that we can prioritize both safety and learning as we prepare for the start of a successful school year. Thank you for your patience and cooperation in these difficult times.

Stay safe and be well,

John J. Robidoux  
Superintendent of schools

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