

Disclaimer

Arabic

Chinese (Simplified)

Gujarati

Haitian Creole

Portuguese

Russian

Spanish

Vietnamese

Good Evening,

There have been many changes since our video update last week. The most significant change is the Commissioner's mandate to return to in-person learning five full days per week at the elementary and middle school levels. From the state's update:

"For many districts, this will be a substantial programming shift mid-school year. Families should expect that districts may need to make challenging tradeoffs to accommodate a full in person instructional mode. For instance, if students are currently learning in a hybrid model, the shift to more in-person days may require changes in classroom learning spaces and, in some cases, teacher-student assignments. If students are currently in a remote model or choose to learn remotely when these new requirements go into effect, the remote learning option may look different than the model offered prior to the implementation of these new requirements."

The key word is disruption.

The state has given school districts an April 5th deadline for returning elementary students to five, full days of at least 5 hours of instructional time per week.

The state has given school districts an April 28th deadline for returning middle school students to five, full days of at least 5.5 hours of instructional time per week.

We have created new school day schedules. We are working on new bus routes. The next critical step are parent surveys.

Parent Surveys:

The district is sending out an elementary parent survey today. Please only fill out the survey if you want to change the mode of your child's instruction from full remote to full return or full return to full remote. The greater the number of changes, the more disruption there will be. If there is a significant number of changes, we may not be able to meet the April 5th deadline for all students. The state is providing district's 4 to 6 weeks to make the change.

The middle school survey will be going out next week. Again, we will be asking you to only fill out a survey if you

want to change how your child(ren) are educated - full remote or full return. If in hybrid, we will assume you want a full return unless we hear otherwise.

We may send out a high school survey next week although we do not have a mandated, state identified date to return high school students to full in-person schedules. The state directive was to be ready to make this change with two weeks notice.

COVID Mitigation

The district is attempting to maintain our COVID mitigation measures in these new schedules. The state guidance allows for 3 feet of masked social distancing. Unmasked activities such as lunch still require 6 feet of social distance.

All students will need to remain in masks for the full days unless provided a supervised mask break. In most cases, lunch for elementary and middle school students will be in their classrooms.

Other Changes

We will be limiting other changes while we focus on implementing the five, full days schedules. In other words,

we will not initially be expanding bus ridership for elementary students. We will explore expanding elementary ridership and establishing new routes as part of the changes needed to combine the middle school cohorts. We hope to have more bus options closer to the end of April.

The Afterschool program hours will initially not change and end at 4:00 PM. We will look at options, like extending the end time until 6:00 PM once we better understand the impact of the full day elementary schedule. Again, the expanded hours may be available closer to the end of April after spring break.

Vaccinations

All of these changes will be easier if our educators and staff get vaccinated. We understand that the state is stating that vaccinations are not necessary for the return to full day, in-person school. We are working with our teacher's union to gather information on how many of our teachers have been vaccinated, are waiting for their second shot, or have a vaccination date scheduled. It is our hope that all of our teachers and support staff can be vaccinated, or in process, by the April 5th mandating full return.

Transferring Teachers:

We understand that some of our educators who have been teaching remotely are doing so because of health concerns. Our plan is to move these teachers from remote assignments to in-person assignments last. In so doing, we may disrupt existing classes if enough students choose to return to full day, in-person instruction.

Gratitude:

We are grateful for our building principals. In a more normal year, it takes principals all summer to prepare for a smooth opening of school. We are asking our Principals and Asst. Principals to essentially prepare for a new school opening in two weeks with schools in session. We are fortunate to have such talented, dedicated, experienced school leadership to manage these changes. Their prior summer planning has allowed our schools to remain open safely to date. Thank you.

Gratitude

Our gratitude this week goes out to all district educators and staff who have been showing up to work. Our elementary schools have been open five days per week since September 10th. What facilitated this opening was a high quality full remote learning academy staffed with talented Burlington teachers. Many communities contracted with the state endorsed on-line school options. We have prioritized establishing relationships remotely and in person and our elementary students, both in person and remote, are making progress.

Our secondary schools created their schedules based on the safety protocols required at the time. We attempted to maximize learning time with live-streaming throughout the week. The ability to teach both in-person and remote students simultaneously is incredibly difficult. Despite the technical challenges, our educators put students first.

We will stress again that our non-remote administrators, teachers and staff have been working all year in person without vaccines. Having this group vaccinated only makes expanding the elementary day and adjusting secondary schedules easier.

Our hope is that a local vaccination program similar to the process used to get our first responders vaccinated quickly and with little disruption can be established for educators and staff. It would only take a day or two to get everyone vaccinated if the vaccines could be distributed to local Boards of Health.

We appreciate that these are frustrating times and that everyone wants to go back to pre-pandemic life. If we are thoughtful and remain mindful that the COVID virus and new variants still exist, we will be there shortly.

