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SUPERINTENDENT'S REPORT—OCTOBER 6, 2020

1. Congratulations and Celebrations

Hooray for Hastings! On September 24, 2020, the Maria Hastings Elementary School was named a National Blue Ribbon School of Excellence by the United States Department of Education. Hastings is the fourth school in the district to achieve this honor, joining three other LPS National Blue Ribbon Schools, including Harrington and Bridge Elementary Schools and Clarke Middle School. [Here](#) is a copy of the announcement that I sent to our school community in celebration of Hastings outstanding achievement! Congratulations to Principal Lipsitz and the entire Hastings school community, including students, staff, and families, as well as everyone in our extended school community who support academic excellence in our schools.

National Custodian and Maintenance Appreciation Day!

On Friday, October 2, 2020, we celebrated National Custodian and Maintenance Appreciation Day! At the Central Office, we are blessed to work with Olga Feliz and Fred Pierrelouis, two dedicated members of our CO team. We are so grateful for all our LPS custodial and facilities staff all the time—and especially during these challenging times! They have worked tirelessly to keep our buildings clean and safe throughout the year. Thanks in large part to their efforts and “can-do” spirit, our students and staff are able to return to school safely.



Lexington Team

The Lexington Team is a group of 125+ volunteers, ages 9-85 years old, heavily involved in making personal protective equipment and supporting the community by outreach activities during the pandemic. The Lexington Team has donated 1,150 masks, 1,813 mask securers, 712 scrub caps, over 2,000 disposable gowns and face shields, and raised \$1,800. This group has 63 wonderful youth volunteers involved, of which nine were recognized with the prestigious President's Volunteer Service Award for this year. We are



extremely proud of these students and all those who assisted in this effort.

2. Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

The LPS Office of Equity & Student Supports is creating a Student Advisory Council (SAC) for the district's diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) efforts. The SAC will serve as a body of student leaders in grades 7-12, representing the interests of their school and peers to the district. These student leaders will bring diverse perspectives on issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion, and will help to shape district responses around these matters. Interested students should complete this short [Google Form](#).

Administrators in the district are being further trained in the role Civil Rights plays in school discipline and conflict. Attorney Michael Joyce, a former public school teacher and former Civil Rights Attorney for the United States Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights (OCR) will facilitate a training to define the legal obligations and school district liability under State and Federal law, as well as pragmatic approaches to conducting thorough, reliable, and fair investigations. In addition, he will review how to implement remedial measures designed to eliminate bullying and/or harassment.

A page on the district's equity website has been updated to provide information to staff, students, and community members about their options for reporting incidents of conflict, including potential bullying and Civil Rights violations. All school webpages have been updated to direct parties to this page. The Director of Equity & Student Supports is working in collaboration with the Director of Planning and Assessment to use the newly updated district online reporting form each school is now using to collect more measurable data on how many incidents are actually being reported in relation to the outcome and findings related to bullying and civil rights harassment.

3. LexREConnect: A Childcare Program for Town of Lexington Employees

We are pleased to announce that a childcare program for Town of Lexington employees will be available soon! The Early Education and Childcare (EEC) recently approved the application submitted by Melissa Battite, Lexington Recreation Director. We extend our appreciation to the Town Manager and his team for partnering with us, and we thank Melissa Battite for all her hard work. We anticipate that LexREConnect will be up and running at Cary Memorial Hall by mid-to-late October. To learn more about the program details, see this October 2, 2020 [memo](#).

4. Enrollment Update

Student enrollment is often a key driver of many decisions a school system and community must make. Enrollment affects decisions about budget, academic offerings and services, facilities, transportation, staffing and other resource allocation, as well as logistical decisions. We also use enrollment data, along with other sources, to better understand the current and potentially changing characteristics of our student population, so we may adjust our curriculum, instruction, and other services appropriately. New enrollment data for the 2020-21 school year can be found [here](#).

5. LPS Employee Leaves Update

One of the most challenging aspects of planning for a return to school during a pandemic has been in finding ways to accommodate LPS staff who have legitimate reasons for wanting to work remotely during the pandemic. We are offering hybrid in-person learning experiences to students, which means we need available staff to assist with students. In a typical year, we approve a total of no more than five to ten leaves of various types—but this is no typical year. There are various types of leave that LPS employees can access, and the summary below describes those types of leave, as well as the number of leaves that have been granted.

- **17** full year “Leaves of Absence (LOA) Without Pay” have been granted, four of which were granted prior to the pandemic. An employee Leave of Absence Without Pay is an authorized, extended leave that typically lasts up to one year. Collective bargaining agreements typically include language that specifies the types of reasons individuals may apply for a leave, the date-certain by which individuals can apply, and a statement indicating leaves without pay are at the discretion of the Superintendent of Schools.
- **79** remote assignments have been granted to staff, utilizing the interactive dialogue process, as recommended through the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) requires employers to provide reasonable accommodations to enable employees with disabilities access to equal employment opportunities. An employer must provide the accommodation, unless it would pose an undue hardship, such as difficulty and expense. Rarely, if ever, has LPS granted an accommodation for a remote assignment to employees in previous years. This year, we used the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) guidelines to identify those individuals who may be at the greatest risk during the pandemic. A “reasonable accommodation” can include anything from additional Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) to a remote assignment. In many cases, an employee’s request to work remotely would require us to hire another Full-Time Equivalent (FTE), for which we have not budgeted, or it may leave us short-staffed and unable to ensure the safety of our students. In those cases, a remote assignment would not be considered a reasonable accommodation from an employer’s perspective.
- **24** short-term leaves have been granted through the Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA) for a period of up to 12 weeks. Every employee who was not granted a remote assignment through the ADA process was offered other reasonable accommodations, including FMLA. FMLA leave allows employees to apply their sick time in order to receive pay for a period of up to 12 weeks.
- **13** short-term leaves have been granted through the Emergency Family Medical Leave Expansion Act (EFMLEA). The Family First Coronavirus Response Act (FFCRA) achieves (1) expands the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) temporarily (until the end of December 2020) to cover leave and loss of income when an employee needs to care for children because of school and childcare closures because of COVID-19; (2) creates two weeks of paid sick leave for childcare and other leave related to the coronavirus; and (3) provides for tax credits related to the paid leave mandated by the act.
- **70** remote assignments have been granted to LPS staff through the “Principal Determined Remote Assignment” (PDRA) process. In an effort to accommodate as many staff as

possible, we developed the PDRA process to create as many possible opportunities for staff to work remotely once the building leader was able to affirm that in-person student needs have been addressed. Employees not initially approved for a remote assignment through the ADA process are given first consideration. Very few PDRAs have been approved at LHS due to the way LHS hybrid schedule was structured, requiring staff to be available to complete their duties in-person.

6. COVID-19 Updates

Superintendent Interviewed by Students who Designed their own Podcast. Two talented Lexington High School students recently invited me to be a guest on their Open Floor podcast. Ali Mosallaei is a Junior at Lexington High School and a student researcher at Northeastern University Computer Engineering Research group. Ali designed “OpenFloorTalk,” one of his many interesting coding projects. Ali’s description of his work can be found on his [website](#). He says, “[OpenFloorTalk](#) is another website designed for the [Open Floor Podcast](#), that conducts the interviews for the podcasts. It includes conference recording using WebRTC, and an actual live conference system. It additionally includes a live chat and system monitoring for Open Floor hosts.”

Not only did Ali use his coding skills to design the website for the podcast, he also created the podcast. itself! Ali says on his website, “The [Open Floor Podcast](#) is a podcast I started in June 2020, in response to all of the events happening. The podcast aims to provide a platform for anyone of any background to voice their ideas and opinions regarding issues faced on a day-to-day basis. As of 8/20/2020, the podcast has 10 published episodes, with over 600 total plays.”

Ali is the co-host and producer of the podcast, and Aryan Narayan is the co-host and director. These talented Lexington High School Juniors interviewed me on September 3, 2020. to learn how the educational system has been impacted due to the COVID-19 pandemic. You can listen to the episode [here](#). The students asked thoughtful and challenging questions, and they interviewed like pros! Congratulations to Ali and Aryan on their successful Open Floor Podcast! You can follow Ali and Aryan on Twitter [@theopenfloor](#).

LexMedia Back-to-School Video. LexMedia recently invited me to give an update on the back-to-school process and some advice to parents and students as they navigate the school year. Click [here](#) to view the video.

Transition to Full-Hybrid. At the time that this report is shared, we will be close to completing the “Four-Week Phase-In to Hybrid,” and we will be approximately one week away from full implementation of our hybrid plan, as detailed here on a link to the LPS COVID-19 [website](#). In the September 21, 2020 classroom quarantine memo, we articulate a process for how the school community will be notified in the likely event that we will encounter possible COVID-19 positive cases in schools. All students in the classroom will be notified, principals will inform their school community, and aggregate district-wide information will be available on the LPS COVID-19 website. As positive test rates rise in Massachusetts communities, we will continue to work with the Board of Health and carefully monitor to ensure the safest possible return for students and staff.

October Flu Clinic for LPS Employees. In collaboration with the Lexington Public Health Nurse, David Neylon, our Lexington LPS Director of School Health Services, Karen Rufo has been in contact with the CVS group to provide flu immunizations on site to our LPS employees. The employee flu clinics will be held outside on October 15th, October 27th, and October 29th from 12:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m., more details to come. We are, currently, exploring the possibility of a Saturday Flu Clinic for LPS students as well.

Memorandum of Agreement. Negotiations with Lexington Education Association (LEA) and the Association of Lexington Administrators (ALA) are ongoing. To date, we have spent approximately 60-70 hours on negotiations, including an all-day six hour session this past Friday. The School Committee should plan for an Executive Session to review the terms of the MOA, with a possible ratification on October 22, 2020.

News You Can Use. Dr. Wendy Heiger-Bernays, Chair of the Lexington Board of Health, recently shared two articles that may be of interest. The first [article](#), “How the COVID 6-Foot Rule Can Lead Us Astray and How We Can Fix It,” was written by Dr. Heiger-Bernays and her team. Lexington’s school reopening work is referenced in another of her co-authored and recently published [articles](#), “Balancing Incomplete COVID-19 Evidence and Local Priorities: Risk Communication and Stakeholder Engagement Strategies for School Re-Opening.” The authors note, “In consultation with local public health officials, stricter guidelines than those required by the state were proposed—namely the use of 6-foot distancing and masks for pre-K-12, as well as explicit consideration of understanding the schools’ ventilation systems and formal recognition of the need for engineering controls. In this case, local public health authorities used emerging SARS-CoV-2 science to support a more restrictive return to school plan. The Massachusetts example illustrates that schools and communities partnering with knowledgeable scientific experts can create the opportunity for more data-driven local decisions that can both influence and educate.”

7. Citizens Academy

Each year for the past three years, the Town of Lexington offers a “Citizens Academy,” which gives new and current residents an opportunity to learn more about the Town’s operations and departments. On Thursday, September 24, 2020, I presented this PowerPoint [presentation](#) to approximately 25 residents during a Zoom meeting at our annual LPS Citizens Academy. Each year, we discuss what is happening in the Lexington Public School system, and we highlight important efforts that are underway. This year, we discussed the process for developing a plan for the 2020-2021 school year, technology, finance and operations, and strategic planning. At the end of the presentation, citizens have an opportunity to ask me questions about the school system. The level of support our schools receive from the Town of Lexington is unparalleled. The Citizens Academy has become one of my favorite events, and I am incredibly grateful to everyone who takes an interest in our outstanding schools!