



February 22, 2021

## **Proposed Expansion of In-Person Learning**

### **Summary of Proposal:**

- Students in kindergarten through grade 6 who are in the current hybrid learning model shift to half-days of in-person learning (morning) and half-days of remote learning (afternoon), five days per week.
- Replace the “Cohort A and B” model with all K-6 students (except those fully remote) in one cohort.
- Begin the shift on Monday, March 1 for kindergarten through grade 3, and on Monday, March 8 for grades 4-6.
- At this time, students in grades 7-12 remain in their current learning schedules as we propose options (AM/PM daily Cohorts) and engage the Marblehead Education Association in renegotiating our agreement.

## **Questions & Answers**

### **Why are Marblehead Public Schools seeking to increase student learning time in schools?**

The use of hybrid and full-remote learning models has been necessary during the COVID-19 pandemic in order to limit the number of people in school buildings and to minimize risk of transmitting the virus. However, we know that neither of these models provides students the full range of academic and social-emotional supports that are available when students are in school every day. Families and educators alike are increasingly concerned about the negative impacts – academic, mental, physical, social-emotional, and otherwise – resulting from students being out of school (or partially out of school) for extended periods of time. Therefore, the district is committed to start bringing more students into school buildings five days per week, wherever it is possible to do so with minimal health risk.

### **Why is it possible to consider expanding in-person learning time now?**

There are several factors that enable the district to explore these options now, but the most significant reason is improvement in the public health situation, most notably the favorable trends in the rate of community transmission. Particularly between November 2020 and January 2021, community transmission rates were increasing at alarming rates, requiring the district to operate with extreme caution. As the public health data become more encouraging, and residents begin to get access to vaccinations (although on a very limited basis so far), we are better positioned to explore relatively safe options for more in-person learning time.

### **What is being proposed to increase in-school learning time?**

The MPS Leadership Team has developed a proposal to make in-person learning available five days a week for many students, beginning with the younger grades. Under the proposal, students in kindergarten through grade 6 who currently participate in the hybrid learning model (alternating between in-person and remote learning) would be able to attend school in person every weekday. Students would have a half-day of in-person learning, be dismissed at lunch time, and learn remotely from home for the second half of the day. The proposal merges the existing Cohort A and Cohort B at each grade level (one remote while the other is in person, and vice versa) into a single cohort.

### **How can the district increase the number of students in schools while still minimizing risk?**

The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) have recommended a series of health and safety measures for schools that, when followed together, can significantly reduce the risk of transmitting the virus. These include mandatory face coverings, daily symptom screening, physical distancing, frequent hand-washing, thorough facility cleaning and sanitizing protocols, adequate air filtration and ventilation, and regular COVID-19 testing. Over the past five months, we have successfully operated schools for hybrid learning by adhering to these and other important precautions. This has also been possible because of the number of families who opted for full remote learning or who have changed learning model choices. We have had over 100 changes since September. As the district prepares to increase the number of students that can be served in buildings every day, we are still able to maintain the recommended 6 feet of physical spacing in classrooms and other school spaces, but only in kindergarten through grade 6.

### **What about students in grades 7-12?**

Given the size, layout, and schedules in our secondary schools, it is not possible to bring more students back to five days of in-person learning while still maintaining 6 feet of physical distancing at this time. In order to expand in-person learning for these older students, we would have to lower the threshold to 3 feet of physical distancing or elect an AM/PM in-person model (half the students attend in the morning and half in the afternoon), but this approach would decrease overall time on learning and require a waiver from DESE. The Cohort A & B morning and afternoon model would have students in both Cohorts in school five days a week.

School reopening guidance provided by the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) cites 3 feet as safe physical distancing, but we have operated, to this point, using the more conservative guidance of 6 feet recommended by the CDC. With the most recent CDC update, we are exploring the revised information in light of our collective desire to bring students back for more in-person learning. We are prepared to explore both options moving forward. A shift to a 3-foot physical distancing requirement would require negotiation and approval from the Marblehead Education Association.

**What is the proposed timeline for these changes?**

Under the proposal, students would be phased in to five days of in-person learning: Beginning Monday, March 1 for students in kindergarten through grade 3, and beginning Monday, March 8 for students in grades 4 through 6. Once details for the 7-12 proposed models are finalized, those students could begin.

**Does the proposal have any impact on families who have opted for full remote learning?**

No. Students learning remotely from home every day will continue to do so.

**If the public health indicators return to less favorable trends, is the district prepared to scale back in-person learning?**

Yes. From early in our planning, we developed guiding principles for our work. Our primary principle has always been welfare, safety and health. We will track and follow federal (CDC) and state-mandated (Massachusetts Department of Public Health) guidelines. We will consult with medical, public health, Marblehead Board of Health and school health experts to adopt practices that ensure that these three principles - welfare, health and safety - are maintained. We have successfully operated in different learning models this year and are prepared to adapt as conditions change.

**What COVID-19 testing does the district have in place to identify and isolate any positive cases?**

Our pooled testing program connected us with Project Beacon, which is familiar to many of our families. This program will launch on March 1, 2021. Be sure to keep an eye on your email as we will be sending letters and consent forms for staff and students who would like to participate. We will continue to follow our established protocols for any identified positive cases and work with MHD BoH on contact tracing.

**Can a family request a change in a student's current learning model?**

Currently, families have the option to switch from full remote to hybrid learning, or from hybrid learning to full remote, only at the end of each marking period. In presenting the proposal to the School Committee, the Superintendent will describe some of the challenges associated with allowing families to request changes sooner than the next marking period. The proposal is viable in its current form because it is based on current participation rates in hybrid learning and remote learning. If significant numbers of families choose to move in or out of particular models, the district may no longer be able to accommodate all requests. This is driven largely by the formula for staffing levels in both remote and in-person classes. In reviewing the proposal, the School Committee may make a determination about options for changing

learning models, based on these constraints. Families would continue to have the option to change learning models at the end of the current marking period, which is March 13, 2021 for K-6 and April 1, 2021 for 7-12.

**Has this proposal been shared with teachers and other MPS staff?**

Yes. The Superintendent held a district-wide virtual meeting for all staff on Monday, February 22 to share details about the proposal and to hear any questions or concerns. Each school also held a faculty meeting to discuss the proposal in greater detail with administrators.

**Does the proposal have any impact on the capacity of school buses?**

The Department of Elementary and Secondary Education released [updated transportation guidance](#) on Thursday, February 11. The revised guidance will allow us to safely transport students in the combined cohorts on our current busing routes. We are working closely with our busing partners for our Marblehead Metco students on these proposed changes to ensure seamless travel to and from the District.

*Last Updated: February 22, 2021*