



Office of the Superintendent

Dr. Brenda Cassellius, Superintendent

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Jeffrey C. Riley
Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education
Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education
75 Pleasant Street
Madlen, MA 02148

November 13, 2021

Dear Commissioner Riley,

On behalf of the Boston Public Schools, we thank you for your consideration of our waiver request. We appreciate the approval of four days of remote learning and your recommendation to implement additional action steps above our current approach in an effort to return to school two days earlier than directed by the Boston Public Health Commission (BPHC).

Boston Public Schools (BPS) and the BPHC met to discuss your proposed return date of Wednesday, November 17. We share your urgency to return students and staff to in-person learning. We are equally committed to balancing that with the need to immediately stop community spread, especially when cases grow exponentially and rapidly as they did in this case despite adherence to health and safety protocols and ramped up staffing for testing and contact tracing.

Based on your recommendations and the need to balance broader public health responsibilities, the Boston Public Health Commission continues to recommend a 10-day quarantine period.

You outlined a number of steps, including setting up a testing program beginning November 14, noting that these requirements *"are solely the responsibility of the local health commission and Boston Public Schools"*, and have since kindly offered consultation support from the state. We do appreciate your more recent offer after some phone calls between the District and DESE to have CIC provide testing for students and staff on Monday, November 15 and Tuesday, November 16. We will work with your team to see what is possible for testing in terms of CIC capacity and our families abilities to



travel to the school. We know that not all families will be able to get to the school for testing, but we also know that they will appreciate this extra tool to help stop the spread.

As a result of your recommendation for us to provide testing, BPHC made phone calls to multiple vendors to identify a partner who could begin testing as soon as Sunday, Monday and Tuesday. Only one of these vendors reported that they would be available to support our efforts. However, that partner only has the capacity to administer tests for 100 individuals. As you know, the Curley School has nearly 1,000 students and over 100 staff. This one available vendor would not nearly meet the testing needs of our school community to return to in-person learning sooner.

Even with the offer of testing on Monday and Tuesday, we are concerned that the proposal outlined in your letter does not take into account the size and complexity of this school. The Curley school has a varied and diverse student body from nearly every neighborhood in Boston. The Curley K8 serves many students with disabilities, some who may likely have difficulty getting to a testing site. And even if we could get our students to a testing site, CIC's turn-around time for PCR testing results has typically been 36 to 48 hours. This would potentially not be enough time for the students and staff to safely return Wednesday.

Lastly, even if we were able to provide rapid antigen tests to accelerate a return to school on Wednesday, we will not be able to control for a student who has not tested and unknowingly is positive for COVID who gets on a school or MBTA bus and possibly exposes other members of the community which could begin another cycle of community spread. We do not want to put potential COVID positive students on a bus, and endanger our students, bus drivers and monitors.

After careful consideration of your response, we still believe that remaining closed for the full 10 days is in the best interest of our students, staff and their families.

We have full confidence in the incredible teachers and staff at the Curley school. We know they are providing high quality remote instruction and connecting with their students in multiple ways during this short but necessary closure. If you still feel strongly that you will not count the additional 3 days in the 180 days required, we have no doubt the school community and our union partners will rally for our students and we will figure out how best to make up the time.

BPS and BPHC will continue to work together for a safe return to school for our students and staff on Monday, November 22. A deep cleaning of the school is happening this week and we are planning a vaccine clinic for students and staff. We will also remind families and staff to look at our home health checklist before coming to


school, reinforce proper mask wearing among staff and students, maintain strong ventilation, and promote frequent hand washing.

We are hopeful with vaccines now available for children ages 5 and up we may begin to see an end in sight to this pandemic. We know vaccines are critical to protecting our students, staff, families and Boston community. BPS and BPHC continue to work together to offer education and clinics for anyone who wants a vaccine. Thank you for your continued partnership as we navigate these unprecedented times together.

Sincerely,



Dr. Brenda Cassellius
Superintendent,
Boston Public Schools



Dr. Bisola Ojikutu
Executive Director
Boston Public Health Commission

CC: Mayor Kim Janey
Mayor Elect Michelle Wu
School Committee Chair Jeri Robinson