

Melrose Public Schools Plan Next Steps

As leadership transition moves ahead, robust planning for fall continues

MELROSE, MA (June 3, 2020)—Entering the final weeks of a school year like no other, the Melrose Public School District continues to take action on major priorities, including a Superintendent of Schools transition and a robust planning process for the fall, even as many uncertainties persist. Professionals throughout the District are examining what has happened during the last three months of the remote-learning emergency, including what is working well and what needs to be improved. Planning efforts are being continually adjusted and will be informed by another District-wide family survey later this month.

“While I never could have imagined ending my career in public education during a pandemic, I am as proud as ever to be part of the Melrose Public Schools team,” said **Superintendent Cyndy Taymore**. “Our educators, administrators, support staff, families, and especially our students, have risen to an enormous challenge in an unprecedented emergency. Looking ahead, we have a planning process well underway that considers different scenarios, and which we are continually adapting as new information and guidance becomes available. Come what may, I know that Dr. Kukenberger, in partnership with the School Committee and our City leadership, will move our district forward in a way that ensures access to safe, equitable and meaningful educational experiences for all children.”

While no decisions have been made regarding the physical reopening of school buildings for the 2020-21 school year, several possible scenarios are under consideration. These scenarios fall on a continuum of in-person learning in school buildings with safety precautions to various hybrid situations to fully remote learning. Updates in key areas of transition, planning and operations are provided below.

Leadership Transition. Superintendent Cyndy Taymore and incoming Superintendent Dr. Julie Kukenberger are meeting on a daily basis, and Dr. Kukenberger is actively involved in planning for the fall. She has met virtually with Mayor Paul Brodeur, current building principals and department heads, and she is participating in leadership meetings and the two ongoing principal search processes. These and additional transition meetings will continue throughout the summer. Dr. Kukenberger officially takes over as Superintendent of Schools on July 1, 2020.

Building Safety. Mayor Brodeur, Superintendent Taymore, Dr. Kukenberger, School Committee Chair Ed O’Connell and key staff are meeting with Department of Public Works Director Elena Proakis Ellis and Facilities Manager Jay McNeil on at least a weekly basis. Thus far, building walkthroughs have been completed at all school buildings to assess potential structural updates, personal protective equipment (PPE) needs, additional cleaning and hygiene supply requirements (such as hand sanitizer), and other changes that could be needed to allow the safe entry of students and staff, in some capacity, in the fall. The City and District leadership continues to review guidance from the Melrose Board of Health, state agencies, and the Centers for Disease Control, as well as from outside experts. While the District cannot move

forward with a decision for the fall without more complete guidance from the Governor and the Education Commissioner, which is forthcoming, scenario planning is well underway.

Instructional Continuity Planning. A *Return to Instruction Working Group* has been meeting at least weekly, convened by Assistant Superintendent Margaret Adams and including educators, building principals and department heads at the elementary and secondary level, as well as School Committee Member Jen McAndrew. The Working Group is considering a broad range of questions related to teaching and learning and is developing detailed action plans at the preschool-preK, elementary, middle school and high school levels for areas including:

- comprehensively assessing student learning needs as a result of school closures;
- adapting curriculum, teaching guides and other resources to accommodate student needs and growth;
- accelerating student learning;
- supporting the social-emotional transition of all your students and staff back to school;
- building strong relationships and community;
- providing support for students and staff confronting trauma;
- balancing blended learning (in-person and remote) if needed;
- assessing and providing technology resources and supports;
- improving special education supports;
- engaging parents and families, including via resources, videos and workshops; and
- adapting professional development.

Professional Development. To support educators and students, the District is offering a robust series of free, online professional development opportunities this spring and summer. Trainings began on May 4 and will be convened online over a series of weeks, and Melrose educators are also able to pursue free or low-cost workshops through a partnership with the Salem State Collaborative. Offerings cover topics such as trauma-informed teaching during periods of remote-learning, social-emotional learning and support, breaking down racial inequities, striving for an equitable curriculum, distance-learning strategies, creating engaging videos for online learning, stress reduction, making math accessible for English language learners, and understanding the Special Education Process.

Budget. After a months-long budget process, the School Committee voted unanimously to approve a FY21 school budget on May 5, 2020, recognizing that there are considerable unknowns, especially concerning state funding. The approved budget does maintain current staffing and addresses the increase in enrollment for the fall. On Monday, June 8, the school budget is being presented to the City Council, which approves only the overall funding level.

The Melrose Public Schools leadership team and the Melrose School Committee remain committed to providing the school community with information and guidance as it becomes available. More updates will be forthcoming throughout the summer.