

NORTHAMPTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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SCHOOL COMMITTEE

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Susan Voss



John A. Provost, Ed.D.
Superintendent

Camie Lamica, CPA
Business Administrator

January 15, 2021

Dear Staff & Caregivers,

The Superintendent's COVID Safety Advisory Committee held its regular weekly meeting to review information concerning the spread of COVID-19 within our community and our capacity to manage the current surge. We extended the in-person learning pause last week in hopes of containing the spread of a large cluster outbreak. We feel that at this time we need to pause in school learning for another week in order to provide the safest environment as possible for our staff, faculty and students. In order to avoid further delays, and in anticipation of the demands that vaccine distribution will place on our Health Department, the Northampton Public Schools is in the process of hiring a contact tracer solely responsible for investigating cases within the school community.

Due to Martin Luther King Jr. Holiday and the O-day schedule extending the pause for another week will result in a loss of one or two days of in-person instruction for most students in grades preK-6 and have no effect on students in grades 7-12 who were already scheduled to be in a remote mode for next week. Nevertheless, we understand that every day of in-person instruction is crucial at this point. It is our sincere belief that hiring a contact tracer with a scope of responsibility limited to the Northampton Public Schools is a public health strategy that may allow us to avoid further delays, which we know are extremely difficult for our students and families.

In Northampton and throughout Massachusetts, where there are now more than 43,000 active household clusters, the primary means of transmission continues to be within families. We all have a role to play in getting and keeping our students back in school. **We need your support now more than ever.** We need you to continue social distancing, masking, hand washing, and avoiding gatherings outside of your household family members to bring the current surge under control. Based on our experiences with asymptomatic testing, we will also be adjusting our self-screening procedure and requiring anyone showing **even one symptom of COVID-19 to stay home** when schools reopen on January 25th.

We are committed to safely and responsibly resuming the transition to hybrid learning because we know many of our students struggle with remote learning. We are adding these additional resources and more rigorous screening requirements because we feel these are the best ways to make our schools safe for students and staff.

Sincerely,

John A. Provost, Ed.D.
Superintendent of Schools

Merridith O'Leary, R.S.
Public Health Director