

TO: School Committee Members

FROM: Emily Parks, Superintendent

DATE: May 7, 2021

RE: Planning for 2021-2022

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As we look toward the next school year, we are getting back to strategic planning, while also grappling with the continuing logistics of school during this phase of the pandemic.

In June, the Administrative Council (central office and building administrators) will be spending a day together to debrief this past year and discuss our strategic priorities and goals for next year. We will be returning to the *Strategy for District Improvement* document and beginning the process of revising and updating it. I look forward to sharing the results of that process with the School Committee in the coming weeks.

As we do that strategic work, we are awaiting information and direction from the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) about expectations and requirements for next year. The Commissioner of Education has indicated that DESE will be releasing initial information and guidance to districts by late May with more specific guidance to follow sometime in late June or early July. Needless to say, that timeline is quite late for our planning purposes.

I have also spoken with our COVID Medical Advisory Group to get their sense of the health and safety issues that we should anticipate in the fall. We made the decision as a district to provide full-time, in-person learning for students with many safety measures and protocols in place. We are now trying to anticipate if all of these measures will continue or if there are adjustments to be made. Those decisions have implications for scheduling, budget, staffing, and daily operations. For example, should we keep the COVID Monitoring and Response Team in place? Will we continue to need a student pool testing program and, if so, will there continue to be funding from the state or do we need to identify district funds for this purpose? What adjustments should be made to the School Committee's mask policy? Is it reasonable to assume that by the fall all high school students and perhaps middle school students will have the opportunity to be vaccinated? (The answer to that question has significant implications for a number of decisions, most notably, the structure of lunch and food services operations.)

One of the most important questions is how we will support students and their siblings who due to medical circumstances will continue to require fully remote learning in the fall. Given the emphasis that the state has placed on a full return to in-person learning, and based on preliminary conversations with DESE, it is unlikely that districts will be able to provide a fully remote option to students except in cases of a medical accommodation for a student or their family. In addition, it is likely that next year districts will be obligated to use fully remote academic programs that have been approved for virtual learning by the state. As a member of

the TEC collaborative, Westwood has historically provided access to virtual classes through TECCA, one of two chartered virtual academies in Massachusetts. As a TEC member district, Westwood's students take classes through TECCA, but remain enrolled as WPS students. Students' special education services continue to be provided directly through the WPS. We are hopeful to get DESE approval to allow us to leverage this partnership to support fully remote students in the fall. Later in the month, we will be communicating with our current fully remote families to understand their needs for the fall.

Finally, as we look to the fall, there are more typical issues, unrelated to COVID, that we are working through. In particular, there are two issues I want to bring to the School Committee's attention now so that we can proceed with planning. First, we are analyzing bus ridership and routing to see if we can keep Deerfield on the same schedule as the other 4 elementary schools in the fall. Having all of the elementary schools on the same schedule is much better from a scheduling perspective (for example, for professional development, Extended Day, after school activities). It also facilitates how we schedule staff that are shared across buildings. Second, I am monitoring elementary registrations. Our projections at this point seem on target, with the exception of kindergarten at Downey. While we had anticipated two kindergarten sections at Downey, there are currently 47 kindergarteners registered, indicating a need for 3 sections. Fortunately, the new schedule at the middle school will provide some staffing efficiencies. For the most part, those efficiencies allow TMS to shift staff within literacy and math to support the intervention model. Even with that shift, however, there is still 1.0 FTE available at the TMS to reallocate. I recommend moving that position to Downey.