

Public Schools of Brookline

**School Committee Remote Learning Task Force Expert Advisory Panel 4: Public Health, Safety and Logistics**

Draft minutes of meeting (conducted via Webex): June 12, 2020 3:00-4:45pm

**Panel members present:** Ben Linas, MD; Boris Perlovsky, Nira Pollock, MD, PhD; Serena Rajabiun, MA, MPH, PhD; Vishakha Sabharwal, MD; Benjamin Sommers, MD, PhD; Lakshmana Swamy, MD, MBA; Jenny Tam, PhD; Elena Savoia, MD, MPH (co-chair), Dave Gacioch (co-chair)

**Panel members not present:** Lan Dennie, RN, BSN, CMAC

**PSB senior staff members present:** Patricia Laham (Coordinator of School Health Services); Casey Ngo-Miller (Deputy Superintendent for Student Services); Mary Ellen Normen (Deputy Superintendent for Administration and Finance); Kalise Wornum (Senior Director of Educational Equity)

**School Committee members present:** Sharon Abramowitz (liaison to the panel); Susan Wolf Ditkoff; Mariah Nobrega

1. Dr. Abramowitz introduced the purpose of the panel. Panel members and others present introduced themselves.
2. Dr. Savoia and Mr. Gacioch presented the attached Powerpoint slides as background to inform the panel's discussions.
3. The panel discussed the attached June 5, 2020 memorandum of Commissioner Riley, Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, entitled "Guidance on Required Safety Supplies for Re-Opening Schools."
  - a. Particular attention was paid to the potential role and importance of diagnostic testing in Fall 2020 school operations—including operational logistics, standing physician order, potential funding approaches, and the need to plan for any testing well in advance to allow for budgeting, procurement, and roll-out. If this is to be pursued as a strategy, it likely would require significant coordination with Brookline's Public Health Commissioner.

i. Dr. Pollock agreed to prepare some slides with a potential testing model to explore. Dr. Sommers will help to assess financial/budgeting aspects.

b. The panel discussed whether changes to building ventilation might be needed. No vote was taken, but the sense of the majority of the panel was that this was not a high priority item to consider.

i. Panelists did note that care should be taken around staff lunch/break rooms, etc. to reduce transmission risk, as some panel members' institutions have found higher risk of transmission in such spaces.

4. The panel discussed initial questions received from PSB leaders as set forth in the meeting agenda.

a. Panel members strongly agreed with the importance of limiting cohorts of students and staff to reduce transmission risk and facilitate contact tracing when needed. There was strong consensus on the panel that each group of students should remain in a single classroom, with teachers/staff changing classrooms as necessary.

b. Panel members agreed that plexiglass at student desks is not generally necessary—although may be indicated in certain cases of, e.g., students with medical conditions that place them at higher risk (albeit with care taken to avoid stigma, to manage parent preferences, etc.).

i. PSB senior staff noted that buildings were already being evaluated for installation of plexiglass at high-traffic locations, such as front-desk staff.

c. There was discussion about appropriate square footage and buffers for physical distancing among students and staff. Panel members generally supported use of 6-foot distancing, with additional buffers to allow for movement around the room outside of the 6-foot distance from others. More discussion of this issue to come in subsequent meetings, as there may be other ways to approach this issue without materially increasing risk.

i. Ms. Normen noted that PSB has updated physical space inventories for all buildings that can be consulted as needed.

d. Panel members agreed that similar spacing should be maintained during bathroom visits, which also should be limited in time. Frequent bathroom (and

more general) cleaning will be important and more discussion of that approach is warranted in coming meetings.

e. Panel members agreed that students and staff should be encouraged to wash hands with soap and water before eating and after bathroom visits, but otherwise should rely on widely-available alcohol-based sanitizer dispensers to avoid congregation around sinks and associated time delays.

5. The panel discussed additional matters.

a. Panel members noted the importance of big picture evidence and data—including that school closure appears to be a weak preventative measure.

b. Panel members strongly agreed on the importance of public/family communication and education—including that parents and staff need to employ low thresholds for keeping/sending students and staff home with any illness symptoms.

i. There was discussion of self-temperature/symptom checks daily before coming to school but no consensus conclusions were reached.

ii. One panel member suggested that PSB should also notify parents about paid sick leave for caring for family members with suspected COVID - under the Families First Coronavirus Response Act.

c. Panel members agreed that face mask wearing should be encouraged, but not relied upon—as it will be difficult for adults or children to stay masked throughout a school day, and some will not be able to wear masks for medical reasons. Appropriate physical distancing among students, staff, and any other space occupants will help manage risk when masks are not worn.

d. Panel members discussed the desirability of arranging additional outdoor spaces (e.g. tents, with heaters) to allow for distancing and better ventilation. Panel members also discussed the potential to use gyms, auditoriums, etc. for additional instructional space to allow for distancing.

e. Panel members asked if hallways could be made single-direction. Dr. Wornum advised that this was already under consideration, but would face constraints based on building layouts.

f. Panel members stressed that all protective measures were aimed at reducing transmission risk to manageable and acceptable levels, not at eliminating such risk altogether (which would be impossible).

g. Panel members discussed the importance of an ongoing process of reassessing and revising measures, such as an every 15-day reassessment once school starts.

h. Follow-up questions:

i. How many classrooms have working sinks?

ii. How much clinic space exists in each school building—including separate space for suspected COVID+ students/staff?

iii. How will cleaning of spaces be handled?

6. The meeting was adjourned. The panel will next meet 3-4:30pm on Friday, June 19, 2020.