With the release of the initial guidance from the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education last night, we are continuing, not starting, our efforts to prepare for reopening this fall. Keep in mind that we have already established target focus areas with identified leadership and specific tasks within each focus area. What is more, certain focus areas could begin work in earnest prior to the release of the guidance. There are factors we know will be true about the fall and have started to prepare with that knowledge. For example, we have already begun ordering personal protective equipment (masks and hand sanitizer). We have been partnering with the Inspectional Services Department around health and safety details in our school buildings. We are offering summer training on social emotional learning consistent with our social emotional learning curriculum. Further, an advisory group has been established and will meet next week. This diverse group of stakeholders will serve as a feedback and input mechanism as the plan is developed. The work continues - the release of the guidance will add additional focus to our efforts.

To be clear, what has been released is considered “initial”. Additional guidance will be released before the start of the 2020-2021 school year. At present, our work involves “pressure testing” or determining the extent to which the guidance allows us to realistically do our job within the scope of the parameters set in the guidance. We are required to provide feedback to DESE, which they use to inform the additional guidance. As was recently communicated in a memo to staff and the broader community, our goal is to have a plan for re-opening substantially complete by July 15th. I now see that as a benchmark for communication on progress.

We administered a family survey, which closed on Monday, June 22. I want to publicly thank the nearly 2,500 families who responded. Admittedly, this is not the sample size we sought. Nonetheless, there are some interesting high-level takeaways, none of which should come as a surprise. By virtue of the responses, we know that:

- Remote learning is extremely difficult
- Families are seeking increased academic support for their student
- There are concerns about physically returning to school
Again, with a respondent size equal to roughly 15% of the student population, we need to be careful not to generalize the responses to the other 85%. That said, we always learn from feedback and definitely learned from this survey administration.

Needless to say, we have much work to do in the coming weeks. Typically this meeting is the final one for the school committee and meetings resume in the fall. At a minimum, we will need to schedule meetings in August to review and approve an FY21 budget. Also, it seems prudent to meet occasionally during the summer to review and where necessary approve matters related to the fall reopening.

Last, but certainly not least, it is my pleasure to share that we received the early college designation with Salem State University. This is part and parcel of the deepening relationship with the university. This will no doubt expand early college opportunities for our high school students, but also put them on a path for college completion, as a research clearly indicates. This is a big deal!

Respectfully submitted,

Patrick Tutwiler, PhD