

MTA/AFT/BTU
Public School Reopening Proposals to DESE
July 9, 2020

The unions reserve the right to add to, delete from and further modify this proposal.

Background and Context

In the same way that the state is taking a deliberate and careful approach to reopening the economy, the state must take an equally deliberate and careful approach to reopening our public schools.

Having spent approximately 25 percent of the 2019-2020 school year in crisis mode and learning remotely, all of our students — regardless of socioeconomic status or race — will be coming back with social, emotional and academic needs that we don't yet fully understand. The nearly 390,000 students whose families are at 185 percent of the federal poverty level under the *Student Opportunity Act* will have even more acute trauma than they carried before the pandemic. The intersection of COVID-19 and the Black Lives Matter movement compels us to examine and dismantle structures of racism and classism in society and in the institution of public education. Our schools cannot go back to the conditions under which they operated before COVID-19 or we will fail our students, families, educators and communities at the time of their greatest need. This moment provides us with an exciting opportunity to transform public education to adapt to our new reality.

Educators will need to develop new skills, strategies, teaching methodologies and curricula that match the conditions we will be returning to under any of the three models (remote, in-person or hybrid). Students and their families have ongoing needs that must be met — before and upon return to school. School buildings across the Commonwealth are not yet equipped to meet environmental health and safety standards. To be ready to return, we need time to prepare buildings and physical settings; plan and learn new skills; and welcome and acclimate our students and families. And we need full funding and staffing to address the myriad facets of teaching and learning during a global pandemic.

Local associations and local districts should determine the plan to start the year with that best suits their context — be it remote, hybrid or full return with health and safety protections — and then determine a secondary plan for changes in context. **Standing labor management committees should be established immediately to provide opportunities for regular communication and feedback to the district regarding reopening planning and implementation.** MOUs should be negotiated as dictated by local governing practices. Additional stakeholders such as families, students and community members should also be given ongoing and systematic opportunities to be engaged and to give input. The local plan

should be a living document, the goal of which is to provide a vehicle for ongoing partnership and collaboration with educators, families, communities and students.

Proposal #1 Phased Reopening

1. Phase 1 of Reopening: The first phase is for teachers, Education Support Professionals, substitutes (both itinerant/per diem and building substitutes who are paid a full salary and are available every day) and all other relevant school personnel to have uninterrupted time together to prepare for the return of students and resumption of school in whatever model the local association and district deem best through negotiations. This time will be used for things including but not limited to setting up classrooms and other spaces; learning about the health and safety protocols; making time for professional development and curriculum development; and preparing for Phases 2 and 3 — the Social Emotional Learning (SEL), academic learning and possible hybrid remote education that will be fundamental to the first six weeks of school when students return. The typical district professional development allotment at the start of the school year is wholly inadequate in the context of our current crisis; there is also too much variation from district to district.

2. Phase 2 of Reopening: The second phase is for educators to meet students and families. This time will be used for things including but not limited to meeting one on one with families and students and preparing them for the new health and safety protocols, including physical distancing and mask wearing. This time should be used for social emotional wellness checks, basic needs assessments, an evaluation of technology needs and reconnecting with students, families and school communities.

3. Phase 3 of Reopening: The third phase is the resumption of instruction/learning, whether in person, remote or hybrid, and it focuses on the first six weeks of learning. The foundation of any successful school year is built in the first six weeks. During this time, educators and students will build their relationships with each other, establishing their learning community and school climate and culture. It is a time when we set expectations and rules, learn new structures and routines, and lay the groundwork for Social Emotional Learning (SEL) and academic learning throughout the year. Unfortunately, in too many instances SEL has been reduced to a curriculum block on the daily schedule rather than a process that is integrated into the entire day. Now more than ever, we have to build school culture and embark on SEL in the manner that was intended.

Academically, curriculum and instruction decisions should be informed by what students need and by what will engage them. These decisions should be made by the educators closest to the students — e.g., grade-level or department teams. Business-as-usual instructional approaches — organized around “covering the curriculum,” test prep and test administration— must be avoided, as this will distract from real learning, cause unneeded stress, and produce meaningless results in the case of standardized tests. Local plans should emphasize project-based learning, which provides maximum flexibility as students move between in-person and remote instruction.

4. Phase 4 of Reopening: The fourth phase will be based on an assessment of where things stand, both in terms of public health data and educational progress under the initial reopening plan. This assessment will be led by the joint labor management committee, and will seek input from students, parents and the community. It should take place six to eight weeks after the start of school. Based on this assessment, local associations and districts will determine their next steps — e.g., continue with the initial plan or make modifications through a revised MOU.

Proposal #2 Health & Safety

1. PPE: The state will survey local districts for their personal protective equipment needs and will purchase and distribute PPE to all districts according to needs that will be ongoing throughout the school year.
2. The state will apply all relevant science-based guidelines and OSHA requirements to ensure the greatest possible safety, both for students and their families and educators and their families. These requirements will include physical distancing of at least six feet and mask wearing at all times in classrooms and in other group settings. Masks must be made available for students and staff.
3. As a condition of reopening, all districts must evaluate and, if necessary, upgrade or repair their windows and HVAC systems to provide for proper air exchange, filtration and climate control to ensure the safety of students and educators.
4. All districts must establish baseline protocols for daily maintenance and cleaning.
5. All districts must have protocols for dealing with positive COVID-19 cases, including establishing isolation rooms, testing and contact tracing.

Proposal #3 Modifications/Waivers on State Regulations related to

- Time on learning regulatory requirements for 180 days and 900/990 hours.
- Extending timelines for advancing or renewing current licenses based on barriers to educators' ability to earn PDPs, take or pass MTEs, and meet other coursework or program requirements.
- Educator Evaluations —the current system no longer applies and needs to be rethought and renegotiated in light of the unique circumstances facing educators and administrators.

Proposal #4 Staff Assignments/Workload, Including Alternative Teaching/Learning Arrangements for Educators and/or Students

1. There should be recognition that there will be a need for both remote and in-person educators.
2. As a general rule/expectation, educators should be primarily or exclusively remote OR primarily or exclusively in-person, but NOT both.

3. Educators prioritized for remote instruction should include those in at-risk categories or who have household members in at-risk categories, as well as those with pressing child care responsibilities; districts should consider mitigating child care issues by coordinating teaching and learning schedules regionally, particularly in a hybrid (staggered schedule) environment.
4. If alternative work arrangements are not possible for at-risk educators, there must be provisions for paid leave until alternatives can be arranged.
5. Educator assignments must balance flexibility (e.g., being asked to teach outside an area of expertise) and employment protections (e.g., maintenance of licensure and employment protections, including PTS).
6. Students in at-risk categories or who have household members in at-risk categories shall be provided alternative learning arrangements, including remote learning, for example.

Proposal #5 Full Funding and Full Staffing

1. SOA is the baseline funding.
2. Reopening requires more money and more staff: smaller classes, more bus capacity to enable physical distancing, more nurses and counselors and Education Support Professionals to address student needs, and an unwavering commitment to using the appropriate PPE and following health and safety protocols.
3. Layoffs must be rescinded, and there must be an intentional commitment to hiring more educators of color.
4. The state shall reimburse each district for all necessary PPE, physical materials and other resources necessary for reopening.
5. The state must fully fund existing child care programs so that educators and parents can return to work.

Proposal #6 Reimagine Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment: No MCAS

1. In collaboration with the MTA, AFT and BTU, the DESE shall create professional development requirements for educators that specifically advance anti-bias work and address inequities. Cultural- and linguistic-sustaining practices, including ethnic studies, must be embedded into preK-12, higher education curriculum. The DESE will create criteria for holding administrators accountable for implementing anti-bias work and ensuring that educators have the necessary resources and support to implement this important work.
2. Statement from DESE
 - a. Committing to SEL, trauma-informed anti-bias curriculum as priorities.
 - b. Affirming the need for contractual protections for educators teaching an anti-bias curriculum that addresses social and economic inequities.
 - c. Ensuring that all districts develop plans to recruit, hire and support educators of color and provide multilingual interpreters.

3. MCAS obstructs the goals of reimagining curriculum and instruction; therefore, it must be waived for 2020-2021. Upon reopening, the focus of educators and students must not be on test prep.
4. Waive the MCAS graduation requirement for incoming junior, sophomore and freshman classes.

Proposal #7 Computers and Internet Access for All

1. All students and staff, including paraprofessionals, must have access to appropriate technology to fulfill their roles and responsibilities.
2. All students and educators, including paraprofessionals, must have access to reliable and adequate internet service.
3. District must provide support to students, families and staff to set up and use technology.