

## SCITUATE PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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An Open Letter to:

Massachusetts School Superintendents  
Massachusetts Association of School Superintendents  
Massachusetts Association of School Committees  
Massachusetts Governor Charlie Baker  
Cc: Massachusetts Commissioner of Education

I am here in my office on a Sunday again away from my family responding personally to the 500+ emails and correspondence sent to me and cc'd to our school committee on people's opinions on our recent reopening plans. I am not complaining about working on a Sunday, or every Sunday, many of us do that- my point of this letter is to share with you my frustration that I believe we are working harder not smarter.

Responses to our fall school reopening plans (insert x, y, z it doesn't really matter the plan) have been- if you don't bring kids back they will continue to experience trauma, social emotional deprivation, loss of social interaction with peers and continue to widen achievement gaps, and it's our fault. If you bring our teachers back and one gets sick or dies, well that is on you too. So, either way your decisions are harming the people you are hired to protect. Lawyers respond to the question of "are superintendent's liable if someone gets sick, dies?" with "as long as you aren't negligent." Will Governor Baker's name be on the right side of the v. (defendant) when we are sued? You don't have to be a fan of Boston Legal to answer that one. My former resource officer used to call it "plausible deniability."

My wife prepared me for this as I accepted the position of superintendent – you will need even thicker skin she told me. That is not the problem as often I don't disagree with the arguments being made by our stakeholders. Which brings me to my point- our inability to have a state-wide prescriptive plan laid out by our governor and supported by our commissioner has put us all in a lose-lose situation.

On August 7, our governor came out and reduced public gathering sizes. Something about bars trying to masquerade as popcorn vendors and finding loopholes. The point here is that the Governor and his team of experts have developed a very thorough and sound phased in state reopening plan. In fact, it is working. **Why hasn't that been done for education?** The governor has regular press conferences sharing COVID-19 data and science- because it is about the science and the data, right? Some questions to ponder:

- *Why hasn't the governor shared his state-wide school entry data/science metric for reopening or closing schools like he has for the current state plan?*
- *Why is it left up to individual boards of health?*
- *Where is our state plan by the governor that determines if teachers are essential workers?*

Why are we as a powerful state association not pushing him to answer these simple questions? Why aren't our school committees? Our Communities? I read in the link to the article on the governor's presser on Aug. 7 - "Safety Standards and Checklists: Restaurants" and thought wow, this is an impressive and detailed document with clearly defined expectations, wouldn't it be great if the governor's team had such a detailed and well-thought out plan for our schools? Are they not as important?

We have three weeks before teachers show up to our schools and the governor's frequent televised press conferences are absent the commissioner of education. Wouldn't it be a good time for the governor to have weekly, if not daily, updates on his vision for education alongside the commissioner to put us all at ease and to unify us around one message? It is not too late for us to push back and start holding our Governor accountable.

My plea is that Massachusetts Association of School Superintendents in unison with our members, the Massachusetts Association of School Committees and our local communities get back on our horse and hold the governor accountable. Make him, like us, answer the tough questions:

- *Where is your plan for schools?*
- *Are teachers and support staff essential? And what are your policies around them returning to work?*
- *What are your policies to support your philosophy that we should reopen schools?*
- *What are you doing for our educators who will return to school without daycare?*
- *When you make decisions restricting phase implementation have you thought about the impact and contradictory message it is sending superintendents currently in negotiations to follow your lead to open schools?*
- *When you reduce outdoor gatherings from 100 to 50 have you thought of the impact that has on our plans to have outdoor learning?*
- *When you only allow gatherings of 25 indoors how can you expect to fill schools with 100's?*
- *Why aren't you and the commissioner meeting daily and publicly supporting your superintendents?*
- *What is your scientific metric for when we should open or close schools?*

I feel superintendents (along with our school committees) have been thrown in shark infested waters with each declaration by the governor that restricts advancement of the phases or contradicts his directive to open schools akin to throwing chum in the water. Where is his accountability? Ben Franklin once said, "We must, indeed, all hang together or, most assuredly we shall all hang separately."

The Massachusetts Teachers Association has surely heeded Dr. Franklin's advice, shouldn't we? It is not too late. A lack of a prescriptive statewide governor backed phased in school reopening plan has allowed our towns to reflect our nation in crisis- creating division between parents, staff, administrators, school, and community members. It is time we change that!

I implore our superintendents to write our governor, he is a bright man and strong leader with unlimited resources who can fix this mess. I ask our Massachusetts Association of School Superintendents and the Massachusetts Association of School Committees to prepare strong statements demanding action from our governor and I encourage all parents, caregivers, community members and educators to do the same. Your voice matters and now is the time to get involved on behalf of our children.

William Burkhead

*William Burkhead*

Superintendent Scituate Public Schools