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September 16th, 2020

An Open Letter from the Haverhill Education Association
To
The Haverhill School Committee and Haverhill Public Schools

We, the Haverhill Education Association, are writing this letter to express that we have serious concerns as to the Haverhill Public Schools Administration's ability to safely open schools at this time. Like our parents, educators have been frustrated with the Administration's lack of preparedness and its failure to share information and answer critical questions related to the reopening. The closer we arrive to the children returning to school, the more apparent it becomes that the Superintendent, School Committee and Mayor are unable at this time to safely and effectively bring students into HPS buildings. We acknowledge that Superintendent Marotta is new to the district and many of the problems we face are ones she inherited due to deferred maintenance. However, we have real concerns that the plan can successfully be carried out at this point. On July 9th we requested the Administration to start bargaining with the Union so that we could start the process of planning and implementing the models to safely open schools. The district did not respond to this request until July 30th, and our first bargaining session was not until August 12th, two days after the School Committee voted on their proposed plan, even though the plan was not due until August 15th. Though we have wanted nothing more than to bargain in good faith, the strategies employed by the School Committee and its representatives have only delayed and frustrated the bargaining process.

After negotiating with the Massachusetts Teachers Association, American Federation of Teachers - Massachusetts, and the Boston Teachers Union, Massachusetts Education Commissioner Jeffrey Riley agreed to give all districts in Massachusetts ten days in which to provide Professional Development to prepare teachers to provide meaningful instruction during the COVID-19 Pandemic. The PD provided by HPS has been anything but relevant and purposeful for preparing to teach during this crisis.

As we approach the first days of school, teachers are still waiting for many answers. With the administrative struggles stated above and the safety and preparedness concerns bulleted below, we believe the HPS upper administration, School Committee and Mayor Fiorentini are incapable of safely and productively opening and running Haverhill Public Schools in a hybrid model at this time.

Cleanliness and Preparation of the Learning Space:

- NO buildings and classrooms have a certificate declaring the air quality safe for occupancy at any level, contrary to the Administration's promise. A district-wide "deep cleaning" was not completed as promised prior to requiring educators to return the buildings on Friday, September 11th. Problems observed included nonfunctioning windows, improper carpet cleaning, rodent droppings on the classroom floor, sinks not

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draining or turning on, classrooms not swept, water damage on ceiling tiles, dusty air vents, trash with food from summer school, and univents dismantled or not functioning. One teacher discovered a dead bat in the classroom that had begun to rot.

- Many repairs promised over the summer won't be completed until October.
- In many schools, windows were not opened 1 hour prior to the arrival of staff on the first day. This problem continues in some buildings.
- Staff members are required to be exposed to students without masks while they are eating meals.
- Select students will be interacting with multiple cohorts, increasing exposures and risk.

Remote Learning and Hybrid Model Logistics

- The communication regarding the return of students in September has been inconsistent and unreliable.
- Assumptions about Remote Learning Academy size were based on a survey in June and therefore drastically underestimated what would be required to meet the needs of HPS families.
- Teachers were still without class lists the day before Open House.
- Educators have had their assignments and schedules change multiple times over the last week, creating more confusion. Some educators still have not been informed of their assignments or their personal schedules.
- Google Classrooms were not ready, in many cases, for our first day of School on Wednesday, September 16th.
- The District has made drastic and unilateral changes to building schedules without considering educators' input.
- The Wednesday "remote learning day" for all students still has no clear structure or set of expectations for either staff or students.
- Remote Learning Academy teachers/staff are still unclear about their daily work expectations.
- Accommodations requested by staff with documented needs continue to go unanswered or are rejected despite valid claims.
- Teachers have been assigned to teach too many classes out of their certification.
- Educational Support Personnel have not been given clear direction or purpose.

Professional Development Has Been Inadequate

- YouTube videos describing how to use Google Classroom have been redundant considering the crisis we were thrown into in the spring.
- Educators received little to no training on how to effectively plan a hybrid lesson or manage a hybrid classroom.
- Social Emotional Learning PD was superficial and inadequate.

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- There has been no discipline-specific PD for specialists (Music, Art, P.E., Health, etc.), leaving those educators to fend for themselves with little guidance or direction.
- There continue to be technology issues, including lagging video & audio during staff meetings and third-party software crashes.
- Educators have not been provided adequate time to properly prepare lessons for either remote or hybrid learning.
- Proper training has not been provided on how to teach remote and in-person students simultaneously.
- First-year teachers are not being properly supported. Some still haven't been assigned mentors as required to help them get accustomed to the Haverhill Public Schools.

Once again, this letter is an expression of the HEA's concerns with the Haverhill Public Schools Administration's ability to safely open schools at this time. For years under the leadership of Mayor Fiorentini and the School Committee, our school buildings have not been maintained and have long been considered to be unsatisfactory by staff, parents and students alike. As we begin teaching in the time of COVID-19, it has become abundantly clear that the Mayor's "Fiscal Responsibility" leadership has been fiscally irresponsible, allowing our schools to fall into disrepair and failing to provide adequate funding to education in general well before this pandemic. Administration assured us the buildings would be ready for staff to return on Friday, September 11, 2020, but, sadly, we soon discovered that this was not the case. This lack of leadership by the Mayor and school officials is putting our students, staff, parents and community at risk.