



SPS Response to DESE Recommendation

December 4, 2020 - Springfield Public Schools will not allow Special Education students to return to in-person learning before in-person learning is deemed safe for all students, said Mayor Domenic Sarno, who serves as chairman of the School Committee.

Sarno made his comments following his receipt of a letter from the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) strongly encouraging the District to allow Special Education students to return to the classroom.

“We all have the same goal of getting students and staff back into the school buildings as soon as possible,” said Sarno. “But our priority is and always will be the health and safety of our students and staff.”

The 2020 school year began and remains completely remote for all students. The School Committee will host a previously scheduled virtual Town Hall on Tuesday, Dec. 15th at 6 p.m. to solicit community feedback about the school model for the second marking period. The District currently has plans in place for fully remote education, in-person education and a hybrid model.

A professional assessment of the school building air ventilation systems performed early this fall revealed the need for upgrades of various levels in all buildings. Sarno said that work is currently underway. “Once we are assured all buildings are safe and sound, then we will be ready to bring students and staff back into the buildings. But not a moment before that,” he said.

Sarno added that the current COVID-19 surge ripping through the City of Springfield has his team of public health and hospital authorities on high alert. “The numbers are trending in the wrong direction at this point in time. We do not want to introduce more risk.”

School Committee Vice Chairman Christopher Collins pointed out that the education delivery model during the COVID-19 pandemic is a decision that rests with local government officials.

“The School Committee is committed to listening to our public health experts, facilities’ professionals and community,” said Collins. “Any decision we make to return students to the

classroom will be based on what we are hearing from our community and not undue, unrealistic pressure from DESE. We have to do what's right for Springfield."

Superintendent of Schools Daniel Warwick said everyone shares the desire to have students back in school as quickly as possible but agreed that safety must be the overriding priority. Warwick said the quality of the district's remote education delivery has been recognized across the state. "We are extremely proud of the curriculum and the Herculean efforts that have been put forth to ensure a high-quality remote education for all of our students," said Warwick.

Warwick added that any plan to return students to the classroom would be a phased-in return that prioritizes Special Education students among other student groups.