



October 25, 2020

Marblehead School District families,

This past Friday evening, Marblehead police responded to a house party wherein young people were gathered together without social distancing or face coverings, sharing drinks and generally ignoring the standards our community has set to manage COVID-19. Upon the arrival of the police the attendees scattered so as not to be caught. We all know this is not a new thing for teenagers. However, these are not ordinary times.

This morning I met and discussed this issue extensively with leaders from our town, including Andrew Petty (Director of Public Health), Bob Picariello (Chief of Marblehead Police), Jackie Belf-Becker (Chair of the Select Board), Deanna McMahon (Lead MPS Nurse), Jason Silva (Town Administrator), Sarah Gold (School Committee Chair), Todd Belfbecker (Board of Health Chair), Nan Murphy (Assistant Superintendent), Joan Miller (MEA President), Dan Bauer (MHS Principal) and Andy Clark (MHS School Resource Officer).

We talked about the specifics of this incident and the challenges presented by our lack of identification of the party attendees. We evaluated the ways in which other communities - notably, Lincoln-Sudbury and Dover-Sherborn - have handled similar incidents in recent weeks. I have spoken with both Superintendents extensively. The group this morning reviewed Governor Baker's COVID-19 gathering limits, which stipulate that indoor gatherings be limited to 25 people and outdoor gatherings at private residences be limited to 50 people. We weighed the risks and benefits to our students, staff and the community. We also acknowledged that while today's discussion centered around one house party, we are aware that this is not, in fact, a singular event. There is a troubling pattern of behavior in play, which can be seen across our community. There were arguments to be made, and were, in favor of remaining in our current model or pivoting to remote learning.

**With this input in mind, Marblehead High School will return to full remote learning effective immediately.** Athletics and extracurricular activities are postponed until November 7. While I appreciate that there is a case to be made for closing all the schools in the District, the

information we have about this being specific to high school age students compels me to focus on moving only MHS to remote learning at this time.

- The High School will resume full remote learning from now until November 6th. If there are no cases identified during this time, then hybrid high school may restart on November 9th. If we identify COVID cases during this time we may need to reassess.
- Parents and guardians of known party attendees, as well as the parents and guardians of those who have had contact with party attendees, should bring their children for COVID testing and should require these children to quarantine during this time.
- The families of party attendees are also expected to quarantine during this time, including siblings in other Marblehead schools. Since many party attendees were not able to be identified, this is essentially voluntary but strongly encouraged. If this impacts your family, please contact your building principal to arrange remote learning for siblings.
- Similar to our full remote start, students in our Voice and Bridge programs at MHS will proceed with their in-person schedules.
- The SAT administration scheduled for Saturday, November 7th will continue, provided we are able to proceed according to the published community standards.
- We started with remote learning in MHD so that, in the event of an episode like this, we could pivot quickly to a remote model. Marblehead High School families will receive a subsequent communication from MHS administration regarding schedules and process.

I understand young people's desire to be together, as far away from adults as possible. In choosing to ignore the rules set down by the Governor and our community in the pandemic, however, we are not just endangering individuals... we are also potentially harming the community at large. There is a multi-pronged effort in place across town departments, leaders and citizens, and we are all working together with diligence and compliance not only to keep our schools open but to keep our businesses and restaurants open as well. This isn't just a school conversation. This is a community conversation. And the bottom line is that what we don't know about this situation absolutely CAN hurt us.

It is difficult for me to state how frustrating this is to announce. In my 26 years as an educator, I have never witnessed an effort such as the one undertaken this past summer to reopen our schools. Although exhausting, it has served as an incredible source of pride for our system. I am sorry. For those who have worked so hard to make our reopening happen, and to continue to improve it daily: to those whose lives have now been disrupted; and finally, but most importantly, to those who are at high risk of illness or live with the fear of becoming sick. We must do better.

Thank you for your continued support and help.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "John J. Buckey". The signature is fluid and elegant, with a long, sweeping underline that extends to the right.

Superintendent John J. Buckey  
Marblehead Public Schools