



July 23, 2020

Dear Families,

I am writing to provide an update on how we are thinking about re-opening school this fall, and to ask for your input on the models we are considering. Before getting to that, I do want to inform you of some key dates in the weeks to come:

- **The first day of school for all students will be September 8th - this is a change to our calendar that will allow us to more fully prepare to provide the best educational experience for your student.**
- **We will be announcing what model we will be using to launch the year by August 10th** - either fully in-person, fully remote, or a hybrid model that would essentially split each school into two or three cohorts, with students coming to school 1-2 days/week and learning at home the other days.
- Your input on each of these models is one of the most critical factors we are considering as we make decisions. **Please complete this survey (<https://forms.gle/1S6h4uDb3M12jQ3E8>) by Monday, July 27th.**

You and your children worked so hard this spring, and I am so proud of our community and the work we did to support each other through the spring. I also know that we need space and time to heal, process, and regroup, and my hope is that your family is finding that, as much as possible, this summer.

We are living through an extraordinary time - a time we will be talking about for decades. As educators, parents, and caregivers, we have some very difficult decisions to make in the face of a lot of uncertainty, fear and anxiety. As an organization, we are doing our best to ensure we are making decisions based on our values, and that's hard, because one of the most important decisions we have to make - how do we launch the school year - pits two core values against each other.

Clearly, the primary value we will be prioritizing above all others is keeping students and staff safe from a virus that is still not fully understood and that has already killed over 144,000 people in our country alone – and had a devastating impact on East Boston and Chelsea in particular. From what we think we know about the virus, spending multiple hours indoors with groups of people is risky – we need to reckon with that.

It is also clear that not having schools physically open in the fall could have a negative impact on children and families – particularly on students with disabilities and families where both parents work. We need to reckon with that too.

We have received ongoing guidance from the MA Department of Elementary and Secondary Education and their public health experts, grounded in the evolving understanding of COVID and how it spreads. Because the collective understanding of the science keeps changing, the guidance has changed as well. Currently, they are encouraging us to deliver as much in-person learning as possible – based on three primary drivers:

1. There is a very low infection rate in Massachusetts today, including in Chelsea and Boston.
2. There is no substitute for in-person instruction when it comes to the quality of students' academic learning, as well as meeting their social-emotional needs, supporting their mental and physical health, and mitigating the impacts of trauma.
3. Guidance from infectious disease experts and the American Academy of Pediatrics has affirmed that children are less likely than adults to be infected with COVID-19.



While, at least for now, this is what the state is advising, we have our own decisions to make about Excel and how we will launch the school year. We are still six weeks away from re-opening school, and as we have seen throughout this pandemic, it is challenging to understand what the world will look like months (or even weeks) in advance in order to make decisions accordingly. The national context is frightening right now, with the virus taking hold in the South and West in particular. As the Northeast starts to re-open, it is possible we will see a resurgence here as well. To be scared and anxious right now is entirely valid. We are still very much in the middle of this and need your support to ensure we are making the best decisions for our schools and students.

To best serve you and your children, it is clear that we will need to be ready for anything – both as the year opens and until more tangible progress is made against the virus. To that end, we are developing multiple scenarios for how we will operate.

Over the past few weeks, we have been working with the state guidance of a 3-foot minimum between student desks (and 6-foot minimum when eating or any time masks are not worn) to see what is possible within our school buildings – and also what we feel is best for students. Just because it's possible to get more students in the building with a 3-foot distancing plan doesn't mean that we will do it. We are also looking at more socially-distanced in-person scenarios, as well as ways to enhance our remote learning program – both because even in a hybrid model where students are coming to school 1-2 days/week, students will be learning remotely part of the time, and because we need to be ready to implement a fully remote model if the context calls for it. We have also been working very hard to make our schools as safe as possible, including the measures outlined in this **summary health and safety overview**: www.excelacademy.org/wp-content/uploads/Health-Safety-Responses.pdf.

We are asking for your input as we move forward. This is true of any major decision we make at Excel, but particularly this one which so directly impacts your child's physical and mental health. **Again, please complete this survey (<https://forms.gle/1S6h4uDb3M12jQ3E8>) by Monday, July 27th.**

One final thought as we work through these uncertain times: these options are how we are considering launching the new year. None of us knows how this will play out, and so I'd like to end by saying that **in addition to staying focused on our values, we also are going to do our best to be nimble and adaptive; empathetic and generous.** If there is a recurrence of the virus in our community, we will act quickly – in coordination with public health officials. And if there is significant progress made against the virus, we will also make changes. As we have always done, I know we will do our best to take care of each other – and ourselves – as we navigate the challenges in front of us. That has always been one of the most critical reasons for Excel's success – and it will be needed this year more than ever.

Please be safe, and thank you as always,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Owen".

CEO, Excel Academy Charter Schools



Important Reminders:

- **Excel Academy COVID-19 Updates:** www.excelacademy.org/coronavirusupdates/
- **City of Chelsea COVID-19 Updates:** www.chelseama.gov/coronavirusupdates
- **City of Boston COVID-19 Updates:** www.boston.gov/news/coronavirus-disease-covid-19-boston

Please take a look at our Excel Counseling website and Instagram (Excel Be Well). Here you can access a variety of resources including information on managing stress, mental health and well being, and self-care. sites.google.com/view/excelcounseling/

Benefits Access - Summer Support: Excel Academy offers free and confidential assistance to our families in a variety of areas, including information related to immigration services and access to benefits like health insurance and SNAP. Call 617-466-9384 to speak with the Excel Academy Benefits Access Team. You may also submit a request for assistance form. www.excelacademy.org/request-assistance-form/

Meal Distribution: From June 30 to August 31 meals will be available 10AM – 12PM on Tuesday and Thursday. If you need help locating food providers closer to your home, please reach out to Estevan Puerta at 617-466-9384 (Estevan speaks English and Spanish).

What to do if you are sick? Your doctor is the best person to speak with if you believe you may have been exposed to or may be sick from COVID-19. There is an extensive healthcare network in place, and your doctor is an important part of it. If you are experiencing coronavirus symptoms including **fever, sore throat, cough, runny nose, muscle aches, shortness of breath or loss of smell**, your doctor may advise that you get tested. You may also contact these trusted healthcare organizations in the community. **Testing and treatment for COVID-19 related symptoms is available at EBNHC and MGH Chelsea regardless of immigration status, health insurance, or ability to pay.**

- **East Boston Neighborhood Health Center (EBNHC):** **COVID-19 testing is available even if you do not have symptoms.** Call 617-569-5800. You can also call your primary care physician to request mobile routine vaccinations or prescription delivery.
- **Massachusetts General Hospital Chelsea (MGH Chelsea):** Call 617-724-7000.
 - English: www.massgeneral.org/news/coronavirus | Spanish: www.massgeneral.org/es/coronavirus

Local Financial Support and Community Assistance:

- Chelsea Collaborative: www.chelseacollab.org/. The One Chelsea Fund will be providing direct financial support to Chelsea families who have been impacted by COVID-19, and the Chelsea Collaborative is one of the organizations helping get money to families.
- Mutual Aid East Boston: whatsupeastie.com/coronavirusresponse/mutualaideastie/
- United Way: unitedwaymassbay.org/covid-19/get-help/
- City Life Vida Urbana: www.clvu.org/covid19. Call the hotline (English 617-934-5006; Spanish 617-397-3773) for assistance with housing resources.
- The RAFT program helps keep households in stable housing situations when facing eviction, foreclosure, loss of utilities, and other housing emergencies caused by loss of income, increase in expenses, or both. ERMA can provide rental and mortgage assistance to low-income households who have been impacted by the crisis and may not be eligible for traditional or COVID-19 RAFT. [https://www.mass.gov/info-details/covid-19-dhcd-website#residential-assistance-for-families-in-transition-\(raft\)-program-and-covid-19-state-of-emergency-](https://www.mass.gov/info-details/covid-19-dhcd-website#residential-assistance-for-families-in-transition-(raft)-program-and-covid-19-state-of-emergency-)