



## SHREWSBURY PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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April 14, 2020

To: School Committee

From: Joe Sawyer

Re: Pay continuity for staff during the COVID-19 pandemic school closure

Dear School Committee:

At the meeting on March 18, 2020, you voted to authorize that hourly-paid and salaried employees receive their typical pay for mandated closure days through April 6, the original length of Gov. Baker's order to close schools. Subsequent to that, the Governor extended the school closure through May 1. At your April 1, 2020 meeting, you voted to extend pay for all employees through April 17, which represented one additional payroll period, per my recommendation. I communicated that the Committee would need to revisit this at your April 15 meeting, where I would make a recommendation based on updated information as the pandemic situation evolves.

The district has been functioning through a work-from-home model in order to maintain operations, and where staff provide remote learning for students, participate in online professional development, and take part in various organizational meetings.

It is important to note that the Commissioner of the Department of Elementary & Secondary Education, Jeffrey Riley, is advising Massachusetts public school districts to continue to pay all staff during this extended period of closure in order to maintain staffing for the reopening of schools. He also advises that districts continue to pay contracted service vendors, such as out-of-district special education organizations and

school transportation companies, in order to avoid issues where those providers are unable to recommence operations when school resumes at some point in the future. The federal government has also urged employers to maintain employees on payroll if possible, and there are signals that potential stimulus funding from the federal government may be tied to maintaining jobs during the pandemic shut down.

Mr. Collins has continued to analyze the district's financial resources, as noted in the slide presentation sent to you as part of the meeting packet. Mr. Collins's report also created a framework that illustrates the multiple dimensions that must be considered regarding the decision to continue employees' pay during the school closure. These include:

- Fiscal impact of continued pay
- Availability of funds for continued pay
- Cost implications of furloughs or layoffs (local cost of unemployment system)
- Administrative burden (communication & processing re: unemployment system)
- Impact on the School Department's budget (current year and next year)
- State and federal guidance and eligibility for potential funding tied to maintaining jobs
- Continuity of services during the closure and upon reopening
- Disruption to employees
- Morale and loyalty of employees
- Taxpayer sentiment

These dimensions must be considered in light of the options relative to continued pay, furloughing some number of employees, and/or laying off some number of employees.

Because the situation of school closure continues to evolve, I am again recommending that the School Committee take an incremental approach to the issue of pay continuity. While it is highly likely that Gov. Baker will extend the school closure period beyond May 1, since that is the fact at hand, and the next pay period covers April 20-May 1, I think the prudent action at this time is to address this pay period only, while continuing to monitor the situation. It is my recommendation that pay for all district employees be continued through Friday, May 1, for the following reasons:

1. The vast majority of employees are working remotely.
2. If some number of employees were furloughed or laid off, significant costs would be shifted to the Town budget as the Town is self-funded for

unemployment, and the administrative communication and processing burden would be very significant.

3. We could not require any remote work of employees who are furloughed or laid off.
4. Funds are available for all employee groups with the exception of the Extended School Care employees; the \$110,000 required to pay these employees through May 1 can be covered almost in its entirety through estimated cost savings in the operational budget that will be realized through April (\$108,500), with the small remainder of \$1,500 transferred from funds from deferring purchases.
5. Continuity of pay keeps all of our employees financially whole, regardless of role, which is aligned with state and federal guidance.

This recommendation is made with the understanding that continued analysis will be completed regarding the financial position of the school district, and that if the school closure period is extended beyond May 1, another decision will need to be made at a future meeting to determine whether the district will continue to pay certain employees beyond May 1.

I recommend that the School Committee vote to approve the following suggested motion:

*That the Committee vote to approve the continued compensation of all Shrewsbury Public Schools employees through at least May 1 of the mandated school closure for the COVID-19 pandemic, including both salaried and hourly employees, at their contractual rates of pay based on their typical time worked per pay period.*

I look forward to answering any questions you have regarding this recommendation at our meeting on April 15.